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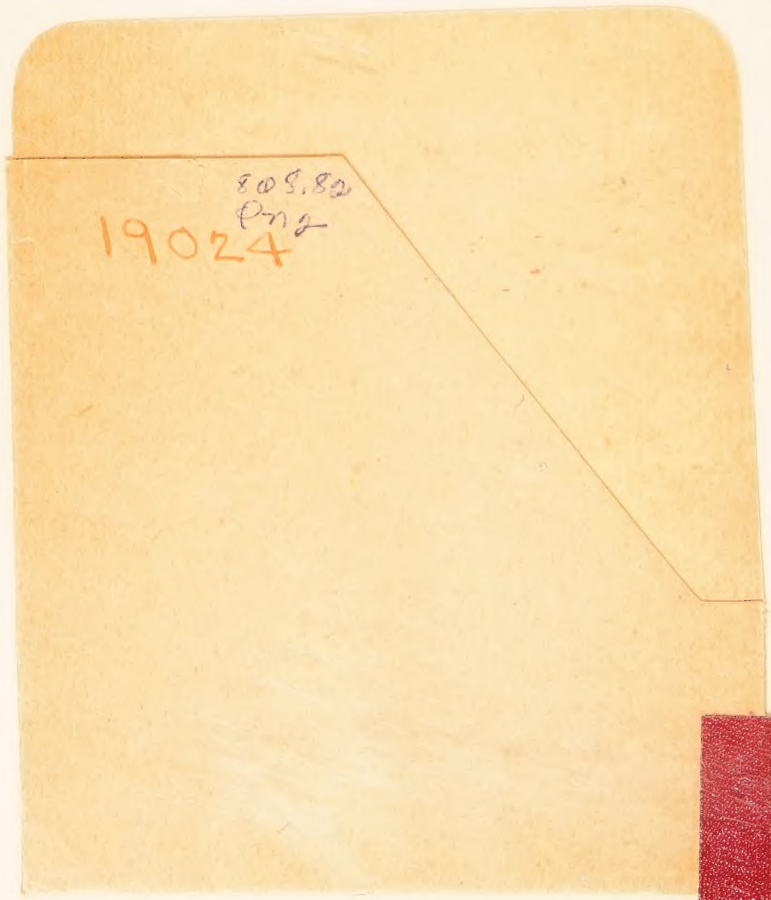

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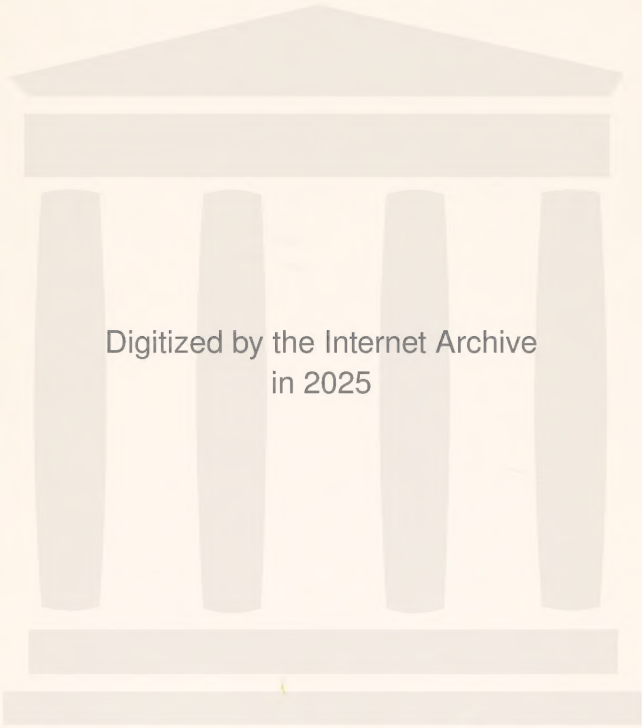
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19 02 IX

AMATEURS THEN AND NOW

BY WALTER PRICHARD EATON

Irvin Cobb has written with reminiscent affection and enthusiasm of the dime novels of his youth. Why not, thought I, write with reminiscent affection and enthusiasm of the amateur plays of *my* youth? Why not preface a volume of one act dramas by such playwrights as Henry Arthur Jones, Franz Molnar, Lady Gregory, Oliphant Down, with an appreciation of "A Pair of Lunatics" or "Mr. Bob" or "The District School"? "The District School" (pronounced "*Skeewl*")—now, there *was* a play! Do you recall how all the parts were taken by the village worthies—the grocer, the town clerk, even the village banker, dressed as boys; estimable members of the Sewing Circle and the Woman's Relief Corps dressed as girls, but modestly veiling their le— pardon me, limbs, in early Victorian pantalettes? And how the boys cut up and threw spit balls and pulled the girls' pig tails, and pretended they were acting just the way they honestly thought they did act once, long ago, when they really were boys? And how coy the girls were! Mrs. Darius Sanborn, age 49, weight 193, being coy offered a histrionic spectacle worth going far to see, I can tell you! And then there was the climax, toward which the whole creation moved. There was, of course, a stupid boy, preferably fat. He was called up to read from the blackboard.

"There is a worm, do not tread on it," teacher wrote in a firm, precise hand.

The stupid boy, with a great show of puzzled inspection of this charitable sentiment, at length found his voice. He began to read. The audience, scenting something good, waited with bated breath. Haltingly at first, and then with triumph, the words came forth: "There is a warm doughnut, tread on it!"

I do not recall anybody leaping to his feet, like the Scotchman at "Douglas," and crying, "Where's your Willie Shakespeare noo?" but the laughter which rocked the house indicated that such a sentiment would have found favor.

Yes, indeed, I might go on indefinitely telling of those glorious days, and I might, if I were artist enough, make you younger people of the present feel something of their naïve and hearty fun. But I could never persuade you that they were better days than the present. I could not persuade you of it because I know just as well as you do that they weren't. Our amateur productions then were almost incredibly crude, the stage management was crude, the acting was crude, and the taste of the audience was crudest of all. The audiences came largely to see their sisters, their cousins and their aunts, as well as their brothers, sons and uncles, make an exhibition of themselves. And they were almost invariably satisfied.

For this crudeness there were many reasons. We were never, even in the rural communities, sufficiently unsophisticated to have a folk drama, or a folk art of any sort. Yet we were not sufficiently sophisticated, even in the larger centres, to take art quite honestly and seriously, especially when we ourselves tried to create it. This is hardly the place for a discussion of these conditions and their causes, which would lead us deep into the social structure of 19th century America. But I must point out that a characteristic result of our attitude toward art was at times an almost ludicrous failure to realize what artistic discipline means, so that we not only plunged into our own productions without plan, without training, and without leadership, but attributed the proficiency of the professional to some mysterious faculties which set him apart from other mortals, and never so much as dared to dream that we could do what the professional did. I remember once, when he and I were in our teens and had organized a dramatic club, Frank Craven, in whose veins, of course, ran professional blood, suggested that we put on a serious play then popular in the professional theatre. The rest of us looked upon him as quite mad. Obviously, we amateurs

couldn't do *that*. We couldn't cross the gulf which separated the amateur theatre from the real theatre. No possible bridge existed. In short, we had no artistic confidence, and we supposed that the crude stuff of the amateur theatre was easier to act than true drama. Boiled down to a sentence, the difference between the amateurs of my early years and those of today is this—the amateurs of today have achieved self-confidence, and have come to realize that effect in the theatre is best gained from the best drama; indeed, that legitimate effect is scarcely to be gained in any other way.

Perhaps I should qualify that statement and say, some amateurs today have done so. A great many more have not, but their number is rapidly diminishing, to a considerable extent because of the help such play collections as this one give them. Lacking self-confidence, lacking from experience an understanding of artistic discipline, they yet are tempted by its availability to try some short drama by an author who has something to say and knows how to say it in terms of the theatre. And suddenly they are astonished to discover that rehearsals, instead of being happy-go-lucky and, after a few evenings, boresome affairs, are progressively more serious and more interesting, as the problem of getting across the footlights a true dramatic emotion or mood or sense of character captures their imaginations. The better the play, the more interesting the rehearsals become, the more the happy-go-lucky, hit-or-miss attitude evaporates, the more surely the true discipline of art takes hold. No real effect is easy. Everything good in the theatre must be planned for and worked for. But when at last the performance comes, and the players discover that actually they can get something of this effect "across," they can make the audience forget to giggle at Sister Bessie in short skirts or brother Bob with a long white beard, but make them, instead, follow the dramatic destinies of the characters in the play, then is the full revelation, then the first true knowledge comes of what the art of the drama is, then, perhaps, is born self-confidence and ambition, and this group of players has joined at last the new amateur renaissance.

I once watched a group of young people, very much in earnest, rehearse Flavin's "Children of the Moon," a difficult and tragic play. With the help of a shrewd director, they had come to grasp just what effects the play should create, and labored intensely, with complete and serious absorption, to achieve those effects. The play was acted before a large audience, in a midland town not habituated to serious drama. I don't say this audience wouldn't have preferred a knockabout farce. They would have—vastly. But none the less they were subdued to the mood of "Children of the Moon." In fact, they were so well subdued to it, so successfully harrowed by its theme, that like most people unused to facing anything but romantic fiction in art, they were a shade resentful. The experience was good for both players and public. It showed the former that hard labor and submission to the discipline of a work of art will enable even amateurs to gain genuine emotional effects in the theatre; and it showed the public that the playhouse can be something more profound than a vaudeville show. Of the two, I very much fear the players took their lesson deeper to heart!

What I would like to preach to all amateurs in doubt about the choice of a play, is confidence, confidence in your own powers, confidence still more in the power of fine drama. An idea to banish and forget as quickly as possible is the idea that a poor, stupid, tawdry play is easier to act than a good one, or that it is more fun, either for you or your audience. As a matter of fact, farce is harder to act successfully than drama, and the better written, the more skilfully constructed, the emotion a play is, the more interesting it becomes to rehearse and to witness. Take, for example, any of the silly old "rube" plays amateurs used to do so much, and compare it with a simple and homely but skilful and humanly true play like Craven's "The First Year." After three rehearsals, the former play will begin to pall on any amateur with an intelligence above that of an anthropoid ape. But I will venture to say that even [illegible] rehearsal of the Craven play the girls in the cast will still be so interested that they have got the most

out of the ludicrous but touching dinner party scene, while the man playing the father will still be trying for a quality he has felt in some relative of his own, and still finding that his technical resources are unequal to his dream. That is artistic discipline—and that, too, is real creative enjoyment.

The effects possible in actual performance, also, vary directly with the merit of the play. Recently I saw the same group of amateurs—not a very skilful group, and not a well directed group—give successively Clare Kummer's "A Successful Calamity" and a second-rate Broadway comedy which shall be nameless. I have no doubt they acted the latter as well as they did the former; but the effect on the audience was tragically different. Clare Kummer's work is distinguished by a rare and elusive quality of personal charm, even distinction, and by a highly individual wit which at times is brilliant. During the performance of "A Successful Calamity" we in the audience often forgave, and sometimes even forgot, the clumsy gestures, the awkward attempts at impersonation, the halting and stumbling stage direction, as some character tossed out an epigram spiced with the Kummer wit, or a situation rapidly sliding toward the sentimental suddenly bumped on the submerged rock of her smiling irony, and we got that delicious thrill of surprise her work imparts. The entire audience, of average small town folks, voted the evening a success. But the same company, coming in a silly play that even Broadway professionals had not been able to pump much life into, had no help from the drama. Their clumsiness, their ineptitude, their awkward stage management, their incomplete impersonations, stood starkly out for our inspection, and I fear a little for our derision. Before the evening was over we were frankly bored. The play that was supposed to be a trifle caviar to our general was a success. The play that was supposed to be just the thing for us was a failure.

Think, then, in choosing a play much less of the supposed taste of your audience, and much more of what will be interesting and stimulating to you through the grind of rehearsals. What doesn't stimulate you will, you may be sure, never stimu-

late your audience. Choose a play that gives you the maximum of help, too, in vividness of situation, depth of emotion, truth in character drawing, brilliancy of wit, skill in the creation of suspense. Have faith in yourself, in your power to do what you honestly want to do and are willing to work hard to accomplish, and have faith in the drama, also. To have faith in the drama means to believe that the best plays are also the best theatre, the plays most worth doing will prove the most effective before an audience—any audience, even that worst of all audiences, your own relatives and friends! Experience has proved this over and over, and thousands of amateurs throughout the United States are now proving it anew each day of the year. If you are afraid to try a real play by a "regular" author, going right after his effects, however serious or even tragic they may be or however hilarious, with every ounce of earnestness in your nature and complete forgetfulness of your workaday self, then you haven't yet really heard the call to produce and act plays, and you had much better return to your daily occupation—or go to the movies.

THE DRUMS OF OUDE

BY

AUSTIN STRONG

Dedicated to my wife—Mary Strong.
A. S.

AUSTIN STRONG

Austin Strong was born at San Francisco, California, in 1881. He was educated in New Zealand and was for some time a landscape architect. During the past twenty years he has written several plays, some of them, like *The Little Father of the Wilderness*, written in collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne. Of his recent plays, *Three Wise Fools* and *Seventh Heaven* have been the most successful, though for many years his one-acters, *The Drums of Oude* and *The Little Father of the Wilderness* have been played with great success.

Published plays: *Three Wise Fools; The Toymaker of Nuremberg; The Little Father of the Wilderness; The Drums of Oude.*

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN HECTOR MCGREGOR
LIEUTENANT ALAN HARTLEY
SERGEANT MCDOUGAL
STEWART, *the sentry*
TWO HINDUSTANI SERVANTS
MRS. JACK CLAYTON, *Hartley's sister*
A PRIVATE

SCENE: *An interior of a palace in Northern India, occupied by British troops.*

TIME: *Spring of 1857.*

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THE DRUMS OF OUDE

Music before curtain rises to be of that mysterious, nervous Indian quality, in a minor key, with the barbaric drum-beat measure throughout.

All lights out. Theater in total darkness. Drumming is heard from beyond the stage, mingled with faint cries. This drumming must be great in volume, yet low in key. It stops short. Repeats itself and again stops short. The curtain has gone up in the darkness. The audience first becomes aware of the moonlit Indian City, in the distance, over the top of an intervening forest.

Then they see the outline of the archway and the stage itself, which is a store-room in an old Indian Palace, now occupied by the British. There is no furniture in the room except a piano, R., and a business desk, R., rear. A large Indian carpet is upon the floor. The only decorations are two crossed swords on either side of the arch.

Sentry STEWART, *in Highland uniform, passes beyond the arch, in the moonlight, from R. to L. Pause. He returns. Pause. Then again from R. to L. The drumming swells in the distance and seems to come from the Indian City. As the* SENTRY *appears on his return beat, the drumming ceases. He halts center of archway and turns a puzzled face towards the audience and listens intently. Dead silence.*

He is seen to breathe a sigh of relief, straighten himself and continue his stolid march. Silence.

Then with a crash door L. bursts open and MCGREGOR *slides in. He shuts the door softly and swiftly and listens intently with his ear to the panels. He gives a glance at the open arch,*

then takes three steps center, stoops, takes hold of the corner of carpet and flings it back. Rises, goes back to door L. and listens at panels again. Then returns center and opens a trap-door which was beneath the carpet. The trap-door is three feet square and eight inches thick.

He looks carefully in and then closing it returns the carpet to its place, stands on it, and listens intently, his eyes to the audience. He then draws from his left-hand coat pocket a large leather cigar case. Chooses a cigar and returns case. He then slowly backs to wall R. When he reaches it he strikes a match upon it with a downward sweep of his hand. He lights cigar and carefully putting out the match, he assumes a graceful, easy position, his back against the wall, his hands rammed deep in his coat pockets and his right foot crossed over his left, his eyes always on the corner of the carpet.

STEWART, *the sentry, is seen to pass at rear. He halts again and listens as if he heard something. He turns his face towards the audience to listen better, and with a start becomes aware of* MCGREGOR'S *presence. He brings his musket sharply to the shoulder, comes down the stage and halts three paces from* MCGREGOR, *his face towards the audience. He makes the stiff soldier's salute, right hand across the body.*

MCGREGOR *continues smoking and regarding the carpet.* (*Pause.*)

McGREGOR (*cigar between his teeth*). Well, Stewart?

STEWART. Please, sir! Beg pardon, sir, but did you 'ear anything, sir?

McGREGOR. Eh?

STEWART. Listen, sir! (MCGREGOR *removes the cigar from his mouth and listens. Dead silence.*)

McGREGOR. What do you mean?

STEWART (*hesitating*). Listen, sir! (*The drumming heard. It stops abruptly.*) There, sir!

McGREGOR. Well?

STEWART. Beg pardon, sir—but me and the men don't fancy it, sir.

McGREGOR. That will do, Stewart.

STEWART. Yes, sir! (*Salutes stiffly—faces about—marches out and resumes sentry duty, and is seen at stated intervals passing and repassing beyond the arch.*

Door L. *softly opens and two* HINDUSTANI SERVANTS *enter, one bearing a standard lamp with a red shade. The lamp is lighted. The other bears a small table which he places at* L. *center. The standard lamp is placed near the business desk.* SERGEANT MCDOUGAL *enters* L. *with* PRIVATE, *both in Highland uniform and carrying telegraphic apparatus. They cross the stage and exeunt door* R. *After a moment ticking is heard from that room. The two* SERVANTS *have by this time returned with the two wicker chairs, which they place* R. *and* L. *and then exeunt.* SERGEANT MCDOUGAL *and* PRIVATE *return through door* R. *The* PRIVATE *crosses stage and exits door* L. SERGEANT MCDOUGAL *comes down center.*

Enter FIRST *and* SECOND HINDUSTANI SERVANTS *through door* L. *They go over to* MCGREGOR *and salaam deeply before him.*)

McGREGOR. I want you to serve supper up here for two. (*They do not move. A pause.*) Did you hear what I said? I said——serve supper——supper——up here for two. (*They salaam and exeunt softly.*)

McDOUGAL. The telegraph is in working order, sir! (*He faces about and goes towards door* L. *Just as he is about to exit*——)

McGREGOR. Sergeant!

McDOUGAL (*stopping abruptly*). Y-y-yes, sir!

McGREGOR. How many men on guard duty?

McDOUGAL (*in a surprised tone*). Seven, sir! (*Pause.*)

McGREGOR. Wake the others up!

McDOUGAL (*his tone more surprised*). B-b-beg p-pardon, sir!

McGregor. Double the sentries. Put Neill and ten men on the ground floor with orders to let no one enter except women and civilians. Take the rest yourself and string them along the walls. North and West sides as much as possible, towards the dome.

McDougal. Yes, sir! (*Is about to exit.*) Pardon, sir—but—but do you know when the regiment will be back?

McGregor. Can't say, McDougal.

McDougal. Thank you, sir. (*Is about to exit.*)

McGregor. Sergeant!

McDougal. Yes, sir!

McGregor. Lieutenant Hartley will take command. Kindly wake him up with my compliments and ask him up here.

McDougal. Yes, sir. (*Exits.*)

(*Drumming is heard again.* SENTRY *is seen to pass from* R. *to* L., *then* L. *to* R. McGREGOR *still regards the corner of the carpet, the cigar between his teeth. Door* L. *opens and* LIEUTENANT HARTLEY *enters; a tall fair-haired English lad, garrulous and pink-cheeked. He is buttoning his tunic and wears the expression of one who has been aroused from a deep sleep. He looks vaguely about for* McGREGOR, *but does not see him.*)

McGregor. Ah, Hartley.

Hartley (*in a thick, sleepy voice*). Oh, there you are—didn't see where you were at first. Why in thunder—(*yawns*)—d-d-did y-y-you w-wake me u-up at this hour? Must be near one or two or something—your man bounced me out of bed as if the house was afire. (*Goes over to table and mixes brandy and soda.*) And why have you moved up to this outlandish store-room? (*Drinks glass, his voice becoming more awake.*) Shifted all your things, too! (*[illegible], and then becoming wide awake he suddenly asks.*) I say, McGregor, what's up?

McGregor. Listen! (*The drumming a shade louder.*)

Hartley. (*[illegible]*) [illegible] business they're hav-

ing. Guess the beggars will keep it up all night. They tell me it is a religious festival they hold here once a year. (HARTLEY *takes a few strides nearer* MCGREGOR.) I say, you don't think there is anything nasty about it, do you?

McGREGOR. India is a queer place, Hartley.

HARTLEY. By Jove—come to think of it—I—did you hear that queer rumor this morning?

McGREGOR. Rumors. You're all alike, you youngsters. I was the same myself once—well, out with it!

HARTLEY. Something about a small cake——!

McGREGOR (*sharply*). What?——Quick——where was it seen?

HARTLEY (*blithely*). The chaps I was talking to said that it was a sure sign that these devils meant mischief. They called it the fiery cross of India and they said that this little cake passes from hand to hand—from village to village—and the message which means mutiny and disaster flies faster than our telegraph!

McGREGOR. Oh, yes—I know all that—— But where was it seen?

HARTLEY. This morning on the steps of the Mission! (*A pause while* HARTLEY *watches face of* MCGREGOR *who goes on smoking.* HARTLEY, *in an eager voice.*) I say——by Jove——you don't think there's a chance for a row, do you?

McGREGOR. Hartley.

HARTLEY. Yes, old chap?

McGREGOR. You are standing over forty tons of gunpowder!

HARTLEY (*standing back and looking down at the carpet*). What!

McGREGOR. Beneath you is the magazine!

HARTLEY. The magazine! (*Stooping and lifting edge of carpet.*) I didn't know it was here! Thought it was by the Colonel's quarters.

McGREGOR. Hartley, these Sepoys want that powder.

HARTLEY. Eh?

McGREGOR. I'm afraid they will be disappointed.

HARTLEY. I say, McGregor—do you really think——

McGREGOR. The regiment is away—we don't know when it will be back. The town is full of strangers. . . . (*Pause.*) Hartley, there are women in this town—white women—English women.

HARTLEY. Rather. And, by Jove, there's my sister, Mrs. Clayton, the widow—I hadn't thought of her!

McGREGOR. Well, you see—I had, Hartley!

HARTLEY (*surprised*). Why, what do you mean . . . ?

McGREGOR. Only that I bribed her woman—her faithful ayah—to bring her here tonight under some pretext or other. I expect her any minute now.

HARTLEY. I say, that was clever of you! (*Pause.* McGREGOR *goes over center for the first time and looks through archway.* HARTLEY, *in a queer voice.*) You have known my sister, Mrs. Clayton, a long time out here, haven't you?

McGREGOR. I remember her before she left England—when you were still at Sandhurst.

HARTLEY. She used often to write me of you.

McGREGOR (*turning*). She did?

HARTLEY. You have been a better friend to her than ever Clayton, her husband, was.

McGREGOR. The man's dead, Hartley.

HARTLEY. Oh yes, I know—but it was all the mater's fault she ever married him. (*Pause.* HARTLEY *goes over to* McGREGOR *in a shy, boyish manner.*) I say, McGregor—give us a chance if there's a row?

McGREGOR (*smiling*). I woke you up for that purpose. You'll take command of the walls in a few minutes. I don't trust anyone here except myself. That is why I had my things shifted. (*Takes out watch.*) The Colonel ought to be near Bandagaar by this time. You stay here a moment—I'll telegraph along the line. (*Goes toward the door at* R.)

HARTLEY. McGregor!

McGREGOR. Eh?

HARTLEY. You're a brick to give a fellow such a chance—thanks!

McGREGOR (*laughing*). Don't be too sanguine, Hartley—it's a bad habit. Perhaps, after all, this is nothing. (*Exits into next room, at* R., *and after a moment is heard telegraphing.*

HARTLEY *takes another look at the magazine, then goes to the center of the archway and listens a moment to the drumming, which, by fine degrees has grown louder. The* SENTRY *passes at rear, but doesn't see* HARTLEY. HARTLEY *goes over* R. *to business desk and idly looks over it. Picks up a newspaper, looks at it a moment, and then drops it. He sees writing materials upon the desk. He seats himself, spreads paper, leans forward and dips pen in ink.*)

HARTLEY (*as he writes*). "Dear mater . . . This is the slowest station in Northern India . . . there is nothing to do . . . no society . . . nothing! Sis is practically the only Englishwoman of any account, except the Major's wife and Mrs. Indermaur. By the way, Captain McGregor, my senior, you remember him . . . the chap Sis used to write us about. . . . Well, he's a thoroughbred and dead nuts on Sis . . . has been all his life, it seems. I think McGregor is the only man Sis ever cared a straw about, but she won't have a word said against Clayton's memory." . . . (HARTLEY *leans back in his chair, lifting his pen and searching the ceiling for ideas. Then leans forward and continues writing in silence.*

Door L. *softly opens and* FIRST *and* SECOND SERVANTS *glide noiselessly in, walking as Orientals do, straight from the hips. They move about quietly setting the table. The drumming ceases suddenly. The* SERVANTS *raise their heads slowly and look deep into each other's eyes, across the table. They both come forward center without changing their relative positions or shifting their gaze from each other's eyes. They stand center a moment listening. Then a*

small white cake, the size of a griddle cake, flies through the archway and falls between the SERVANTS. *The* FIRST SERVANT *drops on one knee and covers the cake with his right hand, and watches his companion.* SECOND SERVANT *takes four deliberate steps backwards, which brings him immediately behind* HARTLEY, *who is deep in his letter.* SECOND SERVANT *slowly draws from his bosom a pistol which he levels at* HARTLEY'S *neck, about two feet distant.* HARTLEY *blots letter with a satisfied air, throws down pen, leans far back in his chair, which brings the muzzle of the pistol within two inches of his neck. He passes his hand through his hair and reads.) (Reading in a satisfied air)* . . . "and I always wear my flannels as you asked me to, and take my two grains of quinine regularly. I forgot to say in my last letter that Spiffy Watkins may have my cricket bat. I shan't need it again, but don't let anyone touch my fishing rod on any account! (*Leans forward to underline*—"*any.*") You needn't be anxious about me, mother dear—there is no danger in India. It's positively dull, it's so safe. Love to everybody—shall write the girls next mail. Your affectionate son, Alan Hartley. P.S.—I repeat—don't let anyone touch my fishing rod."

(*The ticking of the telegraph is heard to stop suddenly.* SECOND SERVANT *hides pistol in his bosom.* FIRST SERVANT *rises and hides cake in his sash. Both assume position at door* L., *one immediately behind the other—watching* HARTLEY *intently.* HARTLEY *rises, folds letter, slips it into envelope, and is about to lick it when he becomes aware of the two Indians staring at him. He is taken aback. They drop their eyes—salaam, and exeunt together.*)

HARTLEY (*takes two paces after them and stopping with a startled expression*) By God, I didn't know those men were in the room. I wish these servant fellows would laugh or smile or make some noise—instead of bowing

and gliding about. (*With a slight shudder.*) Makes a fellow feel deuced uncanny!

McGREGOR (*entering with papers which he throws on business desk, then comes center, sits*). Can't get the Colonel yet. They haven't reached the station—or they have passed it.

HARTLEY (*still looking after the servants*). I say, McGregor, do you trust those two servants of yours?

McGREGOR (*laughing and coming forward*). Implicitly. . . . Come, my dear boy, take a seat and have some supper. (*Motions* HARTLEY *to a seat opposite to him at the table.*) I would trust those two men with my life.

HARTLEY. Well, I suppose you know. For myself, I don't like them. Fact is, I never liked the looks of any of these vermin—they're so damned slippery.

McGREGOR. Hartley, may I give you a piece of advice?

HARTLEY (*taking a large piece of toast. His mouth full*). Go ahead.

McGREGOR. You are new to India—you have only joined the regiment three weeks, and you have an imagination. . . . My boy, quell it—stifle it—for if you let it grow in this hotbed of rumors and strange noises, it will devour you! I have seen brave men made cowards by it. . . . Sherry?

HARTLEY. Thanks. (McGREGOR *pours it out.*) Perhaps you're right, but talking of rumors—do tell me more about this chuppattie cake!

McGREGOR. Fact is, no one knows much about them. A chuppattie cake is the commonest thing in India. Why, it's the food of the people—it's their bread.

HARTLEY. These chaps told me it was a signal of mutiny—they told me of a sentence that went with it—do you know it?

McGREGOR. "Sub lal hogga hi." (*Pronounced "Sub lal hoyarggi."*)

HARTLEY. And what does that mean, pray?

McGREGOR (*slowly*). Everything is to become red!

HARTLEY (*watching* MCGREGOR, *who goes on calmly eating*). Do—do you believe in it?

MCGREGOR. Depends, Hartley, where I saw one.

HARTLEY. What do you mean?

MCGREGOR. If I saw a chuppattie in an out-of-the-way place——

HARTLEY (*eagerly*). Yes?

MCGREGOR (*smiling*). India's a queer place, Hartley. (*Pause.*) I remember when I was with a Sepoy regiment once, the Colonel had us out on a surprise inspection one night, and we found that a corporal had two chuppatties under his pillow. . . . (*Pause.*) We had a narrow escape that night. (*They both rise suddenly to their feet.*)

HARTLEY. Did you hear that?

MCGREGOR (*listening*). Yes.

HARTLEY. Sounded like . . . sounded like a whistle!

MCGREGOR. Sit down! (*They both sit down. Enter the* TWO HINDUSTANI SERVANTS *with more dishes for dinner.*)

MCGREGOR (*to* FIRST SERVANT). Abdul, that lamp is smoking—turn it down. (FIRST SERVANT *crosses the stage to* R. *to standing lamp, which he lowers. He listens all the while intently, with his eyes fixed upon his companion, who is immediately behind* HARTLEY. *As he reaches center of stage on his return, unnoticed by himself or any of the others, the chuppattie falls from his sash to the floor near* MCGREGOR. *Exeunt* SERVANTS *softly.*)

HARTLEY (*using a siphon*). I don't like those two men!

MCGREGOR. Oh, you will get over that, Hartley.

(*Door* L. *bursts open and* SERGEANT MCDOUGAL *enters, breathless—he salutes and stands.*)

MCGREGOR (*going on eating*). Well, McDougal?

MCDOUGAL (*breathlessly*). Please, sir—Mrs. Cameron, Miss Williams and five other ladies, Mr. Palmer and Judge Lawson with some civilian gentlemen, have come into the walls, sir! They seek protection, sir! They're afraid of a rising, sir!

MCGREGOR. Ah! Is—is Mrs. Clayton with them?

McDOUGAL. N-n-no, Sir! P-p-please, s-sir—what'll I do with them, sir?

McGREGOR (*thoughtfully*). Well, I can't very well leave this room. . . .

HARTLEY (*rising abruptly*). I'll go!

McGREGOR. Sit down—I want you here, Hartley! McDougal, put the ladies in the Mess Room and see that they are properly cared for. Give the gentlemen muskets and put them on the North Side as much as possible. Lieut. Hartley will take command in a few minutes. McDougal!

McDOUGAL. Yes, sir! (*About to exit.*)

McGREGOR. And McDougal—

McDOUGAL. Yes, sir!

McGREGOR. If Mrs. Clayton comes, show her up here.

McDOUGAL. Yes, sir. (*Salutes and exits.*)

(*They go on eating in silence.* HARTLEY *tries to hide his excitement and watches* McGREGOR *excitedly. At last, with a great show of unconcern he draws his cup of coffee, uses a napkin, throws it down, and speaks in an obviously careless manner.*)

HARTLEY. My sister. . . . You think she will get here safely?

McGREGOR. I have known this servant of hers for years. Your sister will be here—don't you worry. (*Rises—another pause.* HARTLEY *tries again to hide his excitement.*)

HARTLEY (*obviously making conversation*). I say, McGregor—I am interested about these chuppattie cakes—tell me what does one look like?

McGREGOR (*going over to business desk. He gets cigar box from a drawer and returns across stage. He pauses in the center and looks out into the moonlight.*) Hartley, I don't see that sentry! (*He remains silent a moment, looking out, then comes over to the table and throws the cigar box among the dishes.*) Have a cheroot?

(*Business of* HARTLEY *choosing one.* McGREGOR *puts a match into the candle and facing audience holds it in the*

air, his eyes to the ceiling.) What's a chuppattie look like? Why, let me see if I can describe it to you.

(*Lights cigar thoughtfully—then looks upon the floor, match still burning in his right hand. Sees cake at his feet. Shakes out the lighted match slowly. Puts it carefully in the saucer. Takes a draw at his cigar, all the while examining the cake intently.*) Well, it looks like a griddle cake . . . it's thick—and—er—white. (*Leans down and picks up with his right hand and weighs it.*) Weighs about an ounce —looks deuced indigestible!

(HARTLEY *at this word is in the act of lighting his cigar under the candle shade.* MCGREGOR *carelessly throws cake on table and it falls with a clatter among the dishes.*) Something like that, Hartley.

HARTLEY (*sternly, back*). My God—how did that get here?

MCGREGOR (*looking over the heads of the audience*). I told you India was a queer place, Hartley. (HARTLEY *puts his cigar on his plate and watches* MCGREGOR'S *face excitedly.*)

MCGREGOR (*slowly*). The first thing to be done, Hartley, is to see if that sentry is there.

HARTLEY (*quickly*). I'll go and see! (*Turns and runs towards arch.*)

MCGREGOR. *Stop!* (HARTLEY *stops abruptly.*) Are you armed?

HARTLEY (*with a rising inflection*). No! (*Looks about.*)

MCGREGOR. You will find one in the left-hand drawer of my desk. (HARTLEY *goes to desk, opens drawer, takes out pistol, comes back center holding the pistol in front of him. Is seen to collect himself, square his shoulders and march out into the moonlight with military step. Halts without, his back to the audience.*) What do you see?

HARTLEY. All the men seem to be at their posts. I see Mr. Palmer and Judge Lawson—they have given them muskets.

MCGREGOR. And [illegible]—the sentry? (HARTLEY *disappears* R. *of archway, then returns at a run. He arrives breathless at* MCGREGOR'S *side.*)

HARTLEY (*in a whisper*). They've cut his throat!

McGREGOR. Hartley! Hartley! (*Draws his cigar sharply from his mouth. Pause.*) Hartley, would you mind going into that room and telegraphing?

HARTLEY (*flying to the door* R., *breathless with excitement*). What will I say?

McGREGOR. Get Bandaggaar. . . . If they don't answer get Sir John at Hadraa . . . then the Bulbud Residency. . . . Repeat the one word "massacre" till someone answers you!

(*Exit* HARTLEY, *banging the door. Then the sound of the machine repeating the same message over and over again. Drumming begins again.* McGREGOR *stands a moment longer looking over the heads of the audience, then goes quickly to the business desk and begins pulling out with feverish hurry papers and documents which he tears to pieces. His cigar between his teeth. Door* L. *opens with a bang and the* TWO HINDUSTANI SERVANTS *burst into the room, wildly searching for the lost chuppatties cake.* FIRST SERVANT *is seen feeling in his sash.* McGREGOR *turns sharply around.*) What the devil——

(SERVANTS *immediately salaam and make a pretense of going towards the table.*) Oh yes, we have finished—you may clear away the things.

(*He turns his back to them and goes on tearing up the papers. As soon as his back is turned,* FIRST SERVANT *signals through door at* L. *and out troop all the other* SERVANTS. *They tiptoe down stage, all with their eyes on* McGREGOR'S *back. They pass through arch and one by one leap lightly over the parapet and out of sight. When all have gone—* McGREGOR *speaks through his teeth, still tearing up his papers, his back to the empty stage.*) Look here, you men—I didn't like the way you burst into the room just now! (*Pause, he goes on tearing up papers.*) What did you mean by it? (*Pause.*) I said, what did you mean by it? (*He turns sharply.*) Look here, when I ask a question I expect an answer. . . . (*The words die on his lips as he sees the empty stage.*)

(*Stands silent a moment, looking at the untouched supper*

table. Then takes three deliberate steps backwards, which brings him to R. *of arch. He raises his hand and unhooks one of the Indian swords that decorates the wall, and throws it lightly on the desk within easy reach. He then leans comfortably on the side of the archway, looking out into the moonlight, smoking his cigar. A sound of running feet approaching.* MCGREGOR'S *hand is seen to move towards the sword on the desk. He continues smoking and looking out.*)

A WOMAN'S VOICE. Captain McGregor! Captain McGregor!

(MCGREGOR *removes the cigar from his mouth and gives a quick look at the entrance door. Then, breathless and half crying with excitement,* MRS. CLAYTON *enters wildly and leans fainting against wall* L. *of archway. She covers her eyes with her arm.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*wildly*). Captain McGregor . . . your men . . . your men showed me up here . . . the town is rising! Save me! Save me!

MCGREGOR (*in a polite tone, carefully putting cigar out in a small ash-tray beside him on the desk*). Why, how do you do, Mrs. Clayton?

MRS. CLAYTON. No—no—no—the Sepoys—they're rising—where is my brother?—I escaped just in time! . . .

MCGREGOR (*beckoning on an easy chair towards her*). I know, but won't you sit down? . . . Your brother is here . . . in the next room.

MRS. CLAYTON. Can't you hear them? . . . they're coming . . . we'll all be massacred!

MCGREGOR. Come, Mrs. Clayton. . . . (*Forces her gently into a chair*). Sit down. Your nerves are all awry. Calm yourself!

MRS. CLAYTON. Calm myself! . . . Listen! (*They listen a moment to the drumming.*)

MCGREGOR (*moves over to the table, taking a decanter with which he fills a small glass*). Why, you know what that is, Mrs. Clayton; it's the Muharrum business—religious affair—pious riot—quite harmless. Won't you try some of my sherry? (*Offers glass.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*waving glass aside*). Captain McGregor, the natives are pouring into the town by thousands! They are collecting at the bazaar! There is danger! I feel it here! (*Puts hand on heart.*)

MCGREGOR. Do you think, Mrs. Clayton, that if there was much danger I would be here enjoying a cigar alone?

MRS. CLAYTON. I—I—I—suppose—after all—I—I—I—I have let my nerves get the better of me . . . but, oh, Captain McGregor—just as I was going to bed I began to hear that horrid, queer noise they are making! (*Listens a moment.*) I called Rebottie—you know her—my faithful ayah. Well, she told me that all the servants had fled!

MCGREGOR (*laughing*). You can no more keep a native from a Mohurrum than a small boy from a circus. My servants have left me, too!

MRS. CLAYTON. But this kind of thing never happened to me before! We flew to the stables to saddle our own horses, but they were all gone—they had taken them too. . . . So we ran here on foot—choosing the back street. I could see the town was full of strangers—they are pouring from all quarters! When we came to your gates they sent me up here!

MCGREGOR. They did right—but after all this, you must calm yourself. (*Gives her the glass again, which she reluctantly drinks. While she is in the act, he turns his head slowly and looks through the archway.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*weakly*). I'm afraid I've made an awful fool of myself. You'll have to forgive me, Captain McGregor. You know, really, I am not often frightened, but India has always been a land of horror to me. Full of sounds and strange noises—terrible—terrible silences . . . and always those eyes looking at you! One can't help thinking of what these Sepoys will do when they are once let loose! Remember that Oude massacre. . . . Massacre! Massacre! . . . I can't get that word out of my brain.

MCGREGOR (*still listening and not looking up*). Come—rest a bit. You're worn out!

MRS. CLAYTON (*suddenly, after a pause*). But I can't stay

here—it's late! If you really think, Captain McGregor, that there is no cause for alarm, will you forgive a silly woman and let her return home?

McGREGOR (*slowly*). Won't you stay a bit? . . . Your brother is here.

MRS. CLAYTON. I'd like to . . . (*laughing*)—but it's growing very late!

McGREGOR. Then I'll call Stewart and have him take you home. (*Goes toward arch, thinking deeply. Then stopping.*) By the way, won't you in the meantime play me something on my new piano? I had it shifted up here with my other things—I want you to try it for me.

(*Reluctant, yet to humor him, she pulls off her gloves and goes towards the piano. She pauses to put her gloves upon the table, and sees the chuppattie cake lying among the dishes. She turns quickly with a face full of horror to* McGREGOR, *who is leaning against the archway and looking out.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*in an awed and intense voice*). How did this get here?

McGREGOR. Eh? . . . Oh . . . the chuppattie. . . . Why, you know, I rather like them. Always have them for supper. . . . I'm quite an Indian in my tastes.

MRS. CLAYTON (*with a short laugh of relief*). You must think I'm an awful coward—but you know the rumor of these cakes, and that awful sentence, "All is to become red!" (*Stands still, looking down at it with a frightened face.*)

McGREGOR. Come—you have been badly frightened, and I don't blame you. Do try my piano and forget for a moment this country which you detest so heartily!

(MRS. CLAYTON *goes over to the piano, seats herself and commences playing* "THE WATER LILY" *softly and with deep feeling. The conversation goes on.* HARTLEY *is heard repeating the one word incessantly on the telegraph.* McGREGOR *keeps his position at the side of the archway, looking out.* MRS. CLAYTON *plays for some time in silence.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*stopping abruptly, and in a queer voice*). Did you call that man to take me home, Captain McGregor?

McGregor. Yes.

Mrs. Clayton. I didn't hear you.

McGregor (*coming down stage and leaning over the edge of the piano*). He will be here in a moment. (*She goes on playing again, looking up at him. His voice changes to one of emotion*). That was the melody you played at the Maharajah's ball.

Mrs. Clayton. You remember that?

McGregor. Remember! . . . My life is made up of memories. (*Pause.*) I remember the day when a fresh, young English girl arrived on the decks of a great East Indiaman —and how we cheered her pretty face! I remember a military wedding at Calcutta and Mrs. Jack Clayton, the toast of the regiment. And then I remember when I first saw you in mourning. . . . I remember many things! (*Sighs.*) (*Here a long pause.* McGregor *turns his face slowly and looks through archway*).

Mrs. Clayton (*her voice low and full*). You have been a loyal friend! (*She plays.*)

McGregor (*turning to her with a smile*). How wonderfully you play! (*A pause.*) What a strange and beautiful thing awakened memory is! One can live again those hours one has thought forever lost. Do you—can you—remember and live over those wonderful days—in the old bungalow by the river—the queer lights and tall shadows—when in the gaiety of your heart you called me Major Dobbin?

Mrs. Clayton. Because you were so awkward and were always upsetting my tea cups and things—oh, yes—I remember.

McGregor. I thought you called me Major Dobbin because I was so faithful.

Mrs. Clayton. Perhaps I did. (*She plays on a moment, and then stops and sits looking out into the moonlight in silence,* McGregor *watching her intently the while.*) What a dear fellow you were, Major Dobbin! Ah, a woman never forgets a man's friendship in a time like that—and it seems

I can never get the chance—(*turning to him*) to thank you enough!

McGREGOR. Thank me! . . . Why, I stood by you, as you call it, because I couldn't help myself—because you're the only woman worthy of the name . . . because you took your trouble like a thoroughbred . . . because . . . because you are beautiful . . . because you're straight and tall and your hair is brown . . . because you're true, and clean-hearted . . . because, old friend, I have loved you all my life!

MRS. CLAYTON (*her voice broken*). Major Dobbin!

McGREGOR (*coming to her side and kneeling on one knee*). Aye—Major Dobbin—as ever was!

MRS. CLAYTON (*putting her hand on his shoulder and looking down into his eyes*). You know 'way down deep in your heart that you were the first and only one—and now, old friend, tried and trusted—after all these years of silence and pain—here is your reward. (*With a low laugh.*) A poor thing, Major, but myself—my honor—my life—my—my—(*tenderly drawing his head with both hands to her bosom and putting her lips to his hair*) . . . my Major Dobbin! (McGREGOR *raises his head and their lips meet.* McGREGOR *then stands straight and breathes deep.*)

McGREGOR. It was worth it—it was worth the waiting for! (*The sound of a chair being evidently overturned in room at* R.)

MRS. CLAYTON. What is that? (*Door bursts open and* HARTLEY *bursts in.*)

HARTLEY (*shouting*). McGregor! McGregor!

McGREGOR (*going quickly up to him and speaking in a calm, rapid voice*). Ah, Hartley . . . (*turning*) here is Mrs. Clayton, your sister . . . she sought our protection, thinking that perhaps the Moharrum was a Sepoy rising, but I have assured her that there is no cause for alarm.

HARTLEY (*breathlessly*). It's all right, Sis . . . you needn't be alarmed . . . [illegible] . . . if there had been any danger we would have heard of it.

MRS. CLAYTON. You must forgive us poor women our cow-

ardice, Alan—it is only when we realize our helplessness that we are frightened. Sometimes I wish that I were a man—a soldier—a Highlander like yourselves—instead of a woman who has to wait and listen . . . and listen . . . and listen!

HARTLEY (*blatantly*). It is not all beer and skittles being a man, I can assure you, Sis . . . Why, do you know—just now . . . !

McGREGOR (*sharply*). Hartley!

HARTLEY. Eh?

McGREGOR. Would you kindly take a message for me?

HARTLEY. Pardon me, Sis. (*She inclines her head and goes on playing, her eyes to the keys.* HARTLEY *goes over to* McGREGOR *and both watch her as they speak.*)

McGREGOR (*in an undertone*). Well, what is it?

HARTLEY (*in an excited whisper*). They have cut the wires!

McGREGOR. Ah—I thought as much!

HARTLEY. Sir John says, don't let them get the powder!

McGREGOR. He needn't worry.

MRS. CLAYTON (*stopping her playing and looking up*). Is your man ready, Captain McGregor? (*Politely.*) It is growing very late!

McGREGOR. I am sending your brother to hurry him up. (MRS. CLAYTON *goes on playing.*)

HARTLEY (*to* McGREGOR). Well?

McGREGOR. You'll take command now at once, as they will be on us in a moment. Hold them off as long as possible. I'll stay here and watch that powder. (*Points to the corner of the carpet.*) I daren't trust anyone in this room except myself. If they once get over the walls. . . .

HARTLEY. We're lost!

McGREGOR. If they once do, Hartley. . . .

HARTLEY. Yes?

McGREGOR. Have the bugler sound the charge so that I can hear it. Make him play it loudly, mind you!

HARTLEY. And then——?

McGREGOR. I shall blow up the magazine!

HARTLEY. By Jove——

McGREGOR. Quick—say a word to your sister, and go! (HARTLEY *backs down stage, watching* McGREGOR, *who is looking out into the moonlight—he feels the air behind him for his sister.*)

HARTLEY (*as he reaches her. She continues to play*). I say, Sis, I'm going for the man. I won't be back myself—he'll see you safe home. I want to say good—good-night!

MRS. CLAYTON (*continuing her music*). Good-night, old fellow!

HARTLEY. Sis?

MRS. CLAYTON (*stopping and looking around*). Yes, Alan?

HARTLEY. Pardon my asking, but—has McGregor said anything to you?

MRS. CLAYTON (*looking up and smiling*). Yes.

HARTLEY (*with enthusiasm*). I'm glad! (*Bending and kissing her tenderly.*) Good-night, old girl!

MRS. CLAYTON. Good-night, my brother!

HARTLEY (*goes up to* McGREGOR *and gives him his hand in silence.*) I congratulate you. . . . By Jove, you are a brick. . . . (*Lower.*) Good-bye! (McGREGOR *gives him his hand in silence and* HARTLEY *exits, drawing his pistol.*

McGREGOR *remains a moment looking after him, and then comes down stage and leans on the piano and watches* MRS. CLAYTON *as she continues to play softly. A Sepoy's head and shoulders rise up stealthily from behind the balustrade—beyond the arch. First an arm appearing, then a turban, and then a white-trousered leg is thrown over the balustrade.* McGREGOR *turns quickly and sees the Sepoy who instantly drops out of sight.* MRS. CLAYTON *has seen nothing and continues playing dreamily.* McGREGOR *goes at once to the desk and quickly opens a drawer and takes out a black coil of fuse. He comes down center. He throws back the corner of the carpet, opens the magazine door, gives a quick look through the doorway, and lowers one end of the fuse deep into the magazine.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*not looking up*). Ah! I'm so happy. . . . Tell me, dear, you like my brother?

McGREGOR (*backing and uncoiling fuse*). Rather! (McGREGOR *leaves end of fuse near center.*)

MRS. CLAYTON. I suppose India will spoil him like all the rest—but it's like a breath of old England to see his boyish honest face!

McGREGOR. Rather. . . . (*He says this as he is in the act of taking one of the silver candlesticks, removes the shade, and places it with the lighted candle near the end of the fuse.*)

MRS. CLAYTON. I remember when I first saw India—how terrified I was—the bronze and blackened faces. . . .

(*She happens to look around. She stops playing and rises slowly.* McGREGOR *is standing over the lighted candle with his hands rammed in his coat pockets. He is looking out into the moonlight. She looks from him to the open magazine, and back to him again.*)

MRS. CLAYTON. What are you doing?

McGREGOR (*turning his face towards the audience*). You will pardon me—I have lied to you. I am afraid, after all, there is danger. (*A pause*—MRS. CLAYTON *remains perfectly still.*) I thought perhaps I'd spare you unnecessary alarm, but I'm afraid I can't—you see, the regiment is not on time. I know you for a thoroughbred—you've the blood of soldiers in your veins. So I can tell you plainly how we stand?

MRS. CLAYTON (*after drawing a quick breath*). Tell me!

McGREGOR. That door you see open is the powder magazine. . . . *You* know what it means if these Sepoys capture it—*You* know what it means if I let them capture you. *You* know what it means when they get an Englishwoman in their power! My Highlanders will hold them off as long as possible, and if they fail . . . you see my duty?

MRS. CLAYTON (*after a pause, while she struggles with herself*). Yes!

McGREGOR. I thought it would seem a hard thing to do, but with you beside me—why, girl, I am going to blow up that magazine. . . . Will you stand by me?

MRS. CLAYTON. With my last breath! (*The sound of musket shooting without, rapid and terrifying.*)

McGREGOR. Ah, they've begun already! (*They stand listening.*) Tell me if you hear the bugle call! (*The noise without becomes deafening. Savage yells, hoots and firing. The sky through the archway turns scarlet as if the city were afire. Suddenly the standing lamp at* R. *is shot to pieces by a stray bullet.* MRS. CLAYTON *screams, but still stands beside piano.*) What's that? (*They listen. A sudden lull in the battle and a tiny call is heard gallantly playing in the distance.* MCGREGOR *slowly leans down and takes the lighted candlestick in his hand and looks up at* MRS. CLAYTON. *She goes to him. He then slowly and carefully touches the fuse with the lighted candle. It burns with great display towards the magazine. Together they watch the fuse as it hisses and splutters towards the yawning pit. The noise without becomes deafening. The red light flares more brilliantly—when suddenly the noise stops. Dead silence.*)

MRS. CLAYTON (*dashes for* MCGREGOR'S *side*). Stop it! Stop it! (*She flies to the fuse and stamps it out.*) Can't you hear it? . . . Listen!

(*Pause. They both listen. Then far away in the distance is heard fife, drum and bagpipes playing, "The Campbells Are Coming, Ye Ho, Ye Ho." It swells louder at each approaching step.*

HARTLEY *enters wildly, his coat torn off his back; he carries his smoking revolver, which he waves madly.*)

HARTLEY (*hoarsely, and with excitement*). McGregor—McGregor—it's all right! The Highlanders are here! We're saved—saved!

(*Exits reeling and shouting.*)

(MCGREGOR *puts the candle out by striking the flame with his open palm and catches* MRS. CLAYTON *just as she faints, falling backwards into his arms.*

Curtain falls on this tableau now lit with red fire smoke and resounding with cheers, drums and bagpipes.)

CURTAIN

YOUNG AMERICA

BY

FRED BALLARD AND PEARL FRANKLIN

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Pearl Franklin was born at Bedford, Iowa, in 1885. She is the author of *Howdy, Folks!* (produced in New York under the title of *Thunder*); *I Haven't Time; Following Father;* and of the one-act version of *Young America*. These last two in collaboration with Fred Ballard.

Published plays:

I Haven't Time; Young America (one-act version).

Fred Ballard was born at Grafton, Nebraska, in 1884. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska, and of Harvard. He worked as a property-boy in the theaters of Chicago, and studied playwriting under Professor Baker at Harvard.

His play *Believe Me, Xantippe!*, produced by W. A. Brady, was one of the earliest Harvard Prize Plays. *What's Wrong?* was produced by Belasco; *Young America* by Cohan and Harris; *The Rainy Day* by Frazee; and *Out-a-Luck* by Mrs. Henry B. Harris.

Published plays: *Believe Me, Xantippe!; Young America* (full-length version); *Young America* (one-act version in collaboration with Pearl Franklin).

Young America is based upon Pearl Franklin's *Mrs. Doray* stories published originally in the *Pictorial Review*.

CHARACTERS

JACK DORAY
EDITH DORAY, *his wife*
ART SIMPSON
NUTTY BEEMER, *Art's pal*
JUDGE PALMER

SCENE: *Judge Palmer's office.*

TIME: *The present.*

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YOUNG AMERICA

The scene is a small, simply furnished room with three doors. One to the Left, opening into corridor: one down Right, leading into room where defendants stay while awaiting their hearings: one up Right leading to the Judge's private office. Right Center is a flat-top desk with a comfortable armchair in front of it. Left Center, several chairs. Phone on desk.

Enter DORAY *and* EDITH, *Left.*

DORAY. This must be the place where they'll have the hearing.

EDITH. Jack, we must not allow that boy to be sent to the reform school.

DORAY. But, Edith——

EDITH. It will ruin him, Jack. It will ruin his whole life. If that boy is sent to a reform school—oh! why did you have him arrested? Let him go, dear. It isn't too late. Tell the Judge you've changed your mind.

DORAY (*sarcastically*). Certainly! I'll tell the Judge to pin an orchid on him.

EDITH. Jack!

DORAY (*vigorously*). That kid can't steal my chickens. I caught him dead to rights and I hope the Judge gives him the limit.

EDITH. Why, Jack Doray!

DORAY. I do. I hope he sends him up for life. This is the first quarrel we've had since we were married, and all because of that thieving little vagabond.

EDITH. Ssh! Not so loud. We're not at home now.

DORAY. That's right. Why don't you call me a wife-beater and be done with it? Why don't you——

(JUDGE *enters up Right.*)

JUDGE. Good-morning.

DORAY. Good-morning.

JUDGE. The Court of Domestic Relations is upstairs. (*Goes to desk.*)

DORAY. What!

JUDGE. I say, the Divorce Court—is——

DORAY. We don't want a divorce.

JUDGE. Oh, excuse me.

DORAY. This is the Juvenile Court, isn't it?

JUDGE. Yes.

DORAY. Are you the Judge?

JUDGE. Yes.

DORAY (*crosses to him in a business-like manner. Puts hat on chair*). My name's Doray—J. R. I received this notice to be here this morning at ten o'clock. (*Hands* JUDGE *a letter.*) This is my wife.

EDITH. How do you do, Mr. Judge? (*Crosses to* JUDGE.)

JUDGE. Mrs. Doray? (*To* DORAY.) What can I do for you?

DORAY. I had a boy arrested—Arthur Simpson.

JUDGE. Oh, yes, Arthur Simpson—arrested for stealing chickens.

EDITH. I don't want him to——

DORAY. Well, I do. He's the worst boy in town. Night before last he and his gang put a tick-tack on my front windows and——

JUDGE. Just be seated. (*Speaks into phone.*) Arthur Simpson, please. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

DORAY. Which room is he going to be tried in?

JUDGE (*smiling*). Here. A Juvenile Court is not like other courts, Mr. Doray. We don't try children in the sense that grown-ups are tried. We keep everything as informal as possible—to put the children at their ease. If they are em-

barrassed or frightened they won't talk, and of course, if the Judge doesn't get the child's side of a case, he can't render justice.

(*Enter* NUTTY BEEMER *left. To* NUTTY, *in a friendly manner.*)

Good morning.

NUTTY. Hello.

JUDGE. Were you interested in someone?

NUTTY. Sure. Art Simpson—and he didn't steal them chickens, Judge. Honest to God he didn't.

JUDGE. We'll come to that later. (*Indicating chair.*) Sit down.

NUTTY. Yes, sir. (*Sits on* DORAY'S *hat.*) This must be your hat.

DORAY (*provoked*). Well, it *was* my hat.

(ATTENDANT *enters with* ARTHUR SIMPSON, *down Right.* NUTTY *seats himself.* ATTENDANT *goes out.*)

JUDGE. Good-morning, Arthur. (ARTHUR *does not speak.*) Be seated, Arthur. (ARTHUR *sits.*) Arthur, you are charged with breaking into a chicken coop and taking chickens. Did you do it? (ART *makes no reply.* JUDGE *speaks to* DORAY.) Mr. Doray, will you kindly relate as briefly as possible what you know about this case?

DORAY (*going to desk*). Yes, sir. Well, night before last two friends of mine and I were playing cards at my house. Suddenly my chickens began to squawk. I rushed out to the chicken coop, caught this boy, took him into the house and telephoned for the police.

JUDGE. Was he in the chicken coop when you caught him?

DORAY. No, sir. He was just coming out of the coop.

JUDGE. Did he have a chicken?

DORAY. No, sir. He had two chickens. I chased him down the alley that runs behind my chicken coop but he stumbled over something and fell.

JUDGE. Do you make a practice of keeping the door of your chicken coop locked, Mr. Doray?

DORAY. Yes, sir.

JUDGE. On this particular night was it locked?

DORAY. It was.

JUDGE. Are you sure?

DORAY. Yes, sir.

JUDGE. Did you lock it yourself?

DORAY. No, but——

JUDGE. Then why are you sure it was locked?

DORAY. Because locking up the chickens is a prerogative that my wife has exercised ever since we have had chickens, and when my wife does anything she does it. Don't you, Edie?

EDITH. Your Honor. (*Rises.*) You will pardon my speaking without an invitation—— (*To* DORAY.) And I am sure *you* will forgive me, Jack, for contradicting you——

DORAY. What!

EDITH. But, Mr. Judge, the evening Arthur called on our chickens their coop had not been locked.

DORAY. Why, Edie Doray—you know very well——

EDITH. I know, dear, because I never lock up the chickens until after the dinner dishes are washed.

DORAY. Yes, I know, but——

EDITH. You *began talking baseball and as soon as I had* finished the dishes——

JUDGE. Mrs. Doray, your testimony is somewhat irregular, but it is of great value and I am deeply indebted to you.

EDITH. Thank you.

JUDGE. To break into and enter a building that has been locked is a grave offense. Stealing is, of itself, a crime, but when preceded by the act of breaking and entering, it constitutes burglary, and burglary is a very serious matter. (*Smiles at* EDITH.) So you see, what you have told the Court has a direct bearing on the case. I thank you.

EDITH. You are welcome I'm sure. (*Turns to* DORAY.)

DORAY. Now, Edie, I'm doing this!

JUDGE. Now, Mr. Doray, on this particular night, *was* the door of your chicken coop opened or closed?

DORAY. Well, I'm quite sure, your Honor, that I wouldn't —(*turns to* EDITH *undecided*). Which was it, Edie, open?

EDITH. No, dear, closed.

DORAY (*to* JUDGE). Closed. (*Looks at* EDITH.)

JUDGE. (*To* EDITH.) Thank you. (*To* DORAY.) Mr. Doray, it is quite evident that your wife knows more about this case than you do.

DORAY (*tries to explain, laughing*). Well, you see, Judge, Edie and I have had the doggondest arguments——

JUDGE (*dismissing him coldly*). That is all, thank you.

DORAY. Thank you.

JUDGE. Mrs. Doray— (EDITH *goes to chair and sits.*) Are you sure that the night the chickens were taken, the door to the coop had not been locked?

EDITH. Positively.

JUDGE. But it *was closed?*

EDITH. Yes.

JUDGE. In trying a child, Mrs. Doray, the Juvenile Court must take into account the element of temptation. The *law* assumes that a child is less able to resist temptation than an adult. Have I made myself understood?

EDITH. Perfectly.

JUDGE. Now, Mrs. Doray, what do you know about this boy?

EDITH. He isn't bad. He just hasn't had a chance. He's been neglected. I knew his mother. She used to do my washing and she was a good woman. Arthur wouldn't have been here if she had lived. I begged Jack not to have him arrested——

JUDGE. Thank you—that is all, I believe. I am grateful to you for helping me.

EDITH. It has been a privilege. You don't think you will send him to the Reform School, do you, Your Honor?

JUDGE. That remains to be seen.

EDITH. Thank you. (*Sits.*)

JUDGE (*looks at* ARTHUR, *then speaks firmly, but friendly*). Arthur, the evidence in this case seems to prove conclusively that you did enter Mr. Doray's, or rather Mrs. Doray's, chicken coop, and that you did take some of her chickens. Why did you do it? (ARTHUR *makes no reply.*) Did you

want to sell them? (*Pause.*) Oh, you wanted to trade them off for a motor cycle. (*Pause.* ARTHUR *still makes no reply.*) You have been in this court once before, haven't you, Arthur? (*Still no reply from* ARTHUR. DORAY *gives exclamation.*) This is your second offense. Do you know what that means? It means that you will be sent to a reformatory unless you help me keep you out. Now, why did you take those chickens? (*Pause, then speaks firmly.*) Do you intend to answer my question? (ARTHUR *breaks down and cries.*) Very well—then there is only one thing left for me to do, and that is——

NUTTY (*springs to his feet*). Mr.—Your Honor, Art didn't steal them chickens. Honest he didn't.

JUDGE. How do *you* know he didn't?

NUTTY. 'Cause he was with me night 'fore last, and I know everything he did.

JUDGE. He was with you?

NUTTY. Sure he was.

JUDGE. Then how do you account for his being in Mrs. Doray's chicken coop?

NUTTY. He wasn't. You see, Judge, it was like this. Me and Art an' Bob was on our way home an' was goin' down th' alley to save time. Just as we gits back o' Doray's henhouse, some kid jumps out an' yells, "Beat it!" Now whenever a guy hears de word "Beat it!" Judge, he don't stop to ask no questions—it's time for speed. An' that's what me an' Art done. Well, I makes me getaway, but Art gets his legs all tangled up wid Bob, an' down he flops, the poor boob, an' den dey grabs him. Dat's de way it happened, Judge. Art didn't steal dem chickens. He didn't steal 'em any more'n you did.

JUDGE (*surprised and curious*). Well, this sounds quite interesting.

NUTTY. An' believe me, Judge, it's the truth.

JUDGE. What is your name?

NUTTY. Nutty Beemer.

JUDGE. Are you and Arthur close friends?

NUTTY. Sure. An' he's a prince, Judge. He's a prince when you know him. He didn't glom dem chickens, honest, he didn't.

JUDGE (*to* ARTHUR). Arthur, why didn't *you* tell me this?

NUTTY. 'Cause he didn't think you'd believe him.

JUDGE. Is that so, Arthur?

NUTTY (*to* ARTHUR). Tell him. (*To* JUDGE.) Sure it's so, Judge. That's why he won't answer you now, 'cause he thinks you won't believe him. Nobody believes *him*. Dey all got it in for him—everybody! Dat's why he won't answer ye. The only people he'll talk to is me and Bob.

JUDGE. Bob? Who is Bob?

NUTTY. Art's dog. An' he's some dog, too. He can lick any dog in this town, can't he, Art?

ART (*smiles proudly*). Yes, or any other town.

JUDGE (*to* NUTTY). Sonny, sit there a moment, will you?

NUTTY. Sure. (*Takes witness chair.*)

JUDGE. Now son, you are going to tell me the truth, aren't you?

NUTTY. Sure, Mike.

JUDGE. What did you say your name was?

NUTTY. Nutty.

JUDGE. Your Christian name?

NUTTY. Ain't got none.

JUDGE. What does your mother call you?

NUTTY. You mean me step-mother?

JUDGE. Yes.

NUTTY. Step outside and I'll tell you.

JUDGE. What does your father call you?

NUTTY. He don't—he's dead.

JUDGE. You have been to school, haven't you?

NUTTY. Onct.

JUDGE. Well, what did your teacher call you?

NUTTY (*with disgust*). Percy. An' I'll tell ye, Judge, jes' how I happened to get dat name. Ye see, one time, me uncle——

JUDGE. Yes, yes, I understand. Now, Percy, as you came past Mrs. Doray's chicken coop, you say you saw a boy rush out of it.

NUTTY. Sure I saw him.

JUDGE. And he said "Beat it!"

NUTTY. Yes, but he didn't *say* it—he yelled it.

JUDGE. Did he do anything?

NUTTY. Yep.

JUDGE. What?

NUTTY. He flung some chickens.

JUDGE. What did he fling the chickens at?

NUTTY. I don't know—I didn't take time to look.

JUDGE. But you did see him fling some chickens at something, is that it?

NUTTY. Yep, dat's it.

JUDGE. How do you know they were chickens?

NUTTY. 'Cause I heard 'em squawk.

JUDGE. Yes, yes, of course. Now let me get this matter clear in my mind.

NUTTY. Sure, go ahead.

JUDGE. As you and Arthur were coming home, you went down the alley behind Doray's house to save time—is that it?

NUTTY. Yep, that's it.

JUDGE. Where were you coming from?

NUTTY. Main Street.

JUDGE. What had you been doing on Main Street?

NUTTY. Seein' the movies.

JUDGE. Seeing the movies, eh?

NUTTY. Yep.

JUDGE. Yep—what?

NUTTY. Yep—seein' the movies.

JUDGE. Don't say, "Yep"—say, "Yes, sir," or "No, sir."

NUTTY. Yes-sir or no-sir.

JUDGE. What were you doing before you saw the movies?

NUTTY. Tryin' to learn Bob some new stunts.

JUDGE. And what did you do after you left the movies?

NUTTY. We beat it for home.

JUDGE. Arthur's home?

NUTTY. Naw—Art ain't got no home. He lives wid his aunt.

JUDGE. Mrs. McGuire?

NUTTY. Yes, and she's the meanest woman dat ever lived.

JUDGE. Are you and Art members of the gang that tick-tacked Mr. Doray's house shortly before he caught Arthur?

NUTTY (*disdainfully*). Naw! We got a gang of our own.

JUDGE. Who are in *your* gang?

NUTTY. Nobody but me an' Art an' Bob.

JUDGE. Oh, an exclusive sort of a gang.

NUTTY. Huh?

JUDGE. Eh?

NUTTY. Sir?

JUDGE. An exclusive sort of a gang?

NUTTY. I guess so.

JUDGE. Then on this particular evening you and Arthur had not been up to any mischief whatsoever?

NUTTY. Nope—sir.

JUDGE. But before going to the movies you went down to the railroad station to see the train come in, was that it?

NUTTY. No, sir, I said we was tryin' to learn Bob some new stunts.

JUDGE. Oh, I see! Then it was *after* the movies that you went down to the railroad station?

NUTTY. No, sir. After the movies we beat it for home. Say, I ain't said nothin' about no railroad station. What are ye tryin' to do—make me double-cross meself?

JUDGE (*to* DORAY). Mr. Doray, this seems to be a case of mistaken identity.

DORAY (*rises*). Your Honor, I——

JUDGE. I have no doubt that you saw a boy come out of your chicken coop with two chickens, but in the light of what Master Percy Beemer has just testified, and I have no reason to disbelieve him, there is in my mind a reasonable

doubt that the boy you caught—this boy—was the boy you saw coming out of your coop.

DORAY. But, your Honor, that boy—(*indicating* NUTTY)—didn't say that while running down the alley, he had a chicken under his arm.

JUDGE. How do you know?

DORAY. Because one of my neighbors caught him, but he dropped the chicken and got away.

JUDGE. Oh! (*To* NUTTY.) So you *were lying* to me!

NUTTY (*turns angrily to* DORAY). Gee, you're a beaut! Why didn't ye keep still? Couldn't ye see I was tryin' to save me pal?

DORAY. Oh, you can't pull any of that stuff around here. (*Sits.*)

JUDGE. Now, young man, we will get down to facts. Your alibi for Art was a lie from beginning to end, wasn't it?

NUTTY. Yes, sir.

JUDGE. You and Art Simpson had deliberately planned to take some of Mrs. Doray's chickens, hadn't you?

NUTTY. Yes, sir. But Art didn't do any o' the swipin'. I swiped 'em all meself.

ART. Don't lie no more, Nutty. He'll soak you nex' time. (*To* JUDGE.) He didn't take them chickens, Judge. I took 'em, all three of 'em. He's been stuffin' you to help me.

JUDGE (*to* NUTTY). Then you didn't take *any* of the chickens?

NUTTY. No, sir, but I wuz there an'——

JUDGE. *Silence!* I shall consider this your first offense, but if you repeat it you will be dealt with severely, I warn you.

NUTTY. I got ye, Judge. (*To* DORAY.) Go on, ye big oil-can! (*Sits.*)

JUDGE. Arthur, there seems to be only one thing to do with you.

NUTTY. Don't send him away, Judge.

JUDGE. Silence! (*To* ART.) This is your second offense, and a very serious one. You are charged with stealing, and the charge is proved. In the past, your aunt tried to help

you, but to no purpose. You are wayward, obstinate and unresponsive. What you need is discipline. Therefore, I commit you to the State Reformatory for a period of one year.

NUTTY (*rises*). Don't send him away, Judge. Me an' him's pals, Judge.

EDITH (*rises*). Your Honor, I will act as Arthur's sponsor.

NUTTY. Yes, please!

DORAY (*rises, amazed*). Edith!

EDITH (*to* JUDGE). If you will give the boy one more chance, I will be responsible for everything he does.

DORAY. Edith, you shall do no such thing.

EDITH. But I insist, dear.

DORAY. And I object—I refuse absolutely.

EDITH. Your Honor, I am of legal age and I own property. Does that qualify me to act as sponsor?

DORAY. Now, Edie, do be reasonable. What could you do with a little reprobate like that?

EDITH. Give him a home.

DORAY. You mean have him live with us?

EDITH. Yes, why not?

DORAY. My God! (*Quickly—to* JUDGE.) Your Honor, I positively refuse to allow my wife to——

EDITH. Now, Jack, be reasonable.

DORAY. I am reasonable, but I don't propose to have my home turned into a regenerating plant.

EDITH. But, Jack, dear——

DORAY. No, no, no! (*Gets up and goes toward door.*)

NUTTY. Hey, you forgot your hat.

EDITH. Am I legally qualified to act as sponsor?

JUDGE. You are.

EDITH. Then will you kindly appoint me?

DORAY (*to* JUDGE). Your Honor, I absolutely refuse to allow you to appoint my wife sponsor for that boy.

JUDGE. With all due respect to you, Mr. Doray, the Court reserves the right to act as it sees fit.

DORAY. Edith, come with me. The place for you is home.

JUDGE. Just a moment, Mr. Doray. This case has not been dismissed.

DORAY. It has as far as I am concerned. Come on, Edith. (*Starts for door.*)

JUDGE (*raps with gavel emphatically*). Mr. Doray, this case has not been dismissed.

DORAY. Now look here, do you think— (JUDGE *raps with gavel.*)—I beg your pardon.

JUDGE. Why do you so vigorously oppose this boy entering your home?

DORAY. Because I don't want him there, that's all!

JUDGE. Is it a question of expense?

DORAY. No.

JUDGE. Have you any children?

DORAY. No, but——

JUDGE. You like children, don't you?

DORAY. Of course I like them. But when it comes to raising them I prefer to raise my own.

JUDGE. Naturally, but your wife being appointed sponsor for this boy, is in no way obligated to raise him.

DORAY. Then what *is* she obligated to do?

JUDGE. To keep him until he is able to provide for himself.

DORAY. That's just it. Keep him! I don't want to keep him at all.

JUDGE. My dear Mr. Doray, this boy represents the youth of America. The discipline of a reformatory might make him better, and again it might make him infinitely worse. But if he is taken into a home where kindness prevails, where he will receive the sympathy and mother-love of a woman such as your wife—my friend, this is the golden opportunity of that boy's life, and I may say, Mr. Doray, of yours.

DORAY. That's all very well, your Honor, but everything in my home is peace and happiness. Now why should I spoil it all by taking a thieving little vagabond——

JUDGE. You won't spoil it. The way to increase happiness is to share it with others. Why couldn't you take care of this boy until——

DORAY. Let the State take care of him. That's what I pay taxes for.

EDITH (*appealingly*). Jack!

JUDGE. Our responsibilities as American citizens, Mr. Doray, do not end with the payment of taxes. I am trying to protect this boy's future. And since your wife, who is an equal partner in your home, is willing and desirous of helping the boy, I had hoped that you would he generous enough to assist her.

EDITH. And he will. Your Honor, you don't know Jack. Come, Arthur. (*To* DORAY.) It's our duty to try and help the boy.

DORAY. Well, it's not my duty.

JUDGE. Mrs. Doray, if you are willing to look after the boy, I am willing to give him another chance.

DORAY. *No, positively and absolutely, no!*

NUTTY. The big stiff!

JUDGE. Very well, since that is the way you feel about it. (*To* ARTHUR.) Arthur, before I instruct the Clerk to make out your commitment papers, have *you* anything you wish to say? (ARTHUR *nods his head slowly.*) What is it?

ART. Can I take my dog to the Reform School with me?

JUDGE. No.

ART (*wistfully*). Then what's to become of him?

JUDGE. You should have thought of that before you took the chickens.

ART. But I can't go away and leave my dog.

JUDGE. You should have thought of that.

ART. But he's my friend. Him an' Nutty's the only real friends I got. I had him when me mother died; she thought a lot of me an' him. I don't care what you do to *me*, Judge. Send me to the Reform School for the rest of my life if you want to, but don't take my dog away. He's my friend. He's the best friend I got. Please, Judge, don't take him away from me! (*Buries his face in his arms and cries. Pause.*)

JUDGE. Where is your dog?

NUTTY. I've got him tied outside, Judge. Here he is—come on, Bob. (NUTTY *brings on dog.*)

ART. Hello, Bob. (*Puts out arms, embraces dog. Suddenly sees dog's foot is in bandages.*) What's the matter with his foot?

NUTTY. Night before last when that cop pinched yer, Bob made fer him and he hit him with the club.

DORAY. What!

ART. He did?

NUTTY. Sure, don't you remember that big tall cop?

JUDGE. Why, it's an outrage!

NUTTY. It's a fine bunch of cops yer got in this town.

JUDGE. Did you get his number?

NUTTY. Number? If I'd a rock I'd have knocked his block off.

JUDGE. Bob, you being an accessory to the crime which your master has committed, I hereby commit *you* to the State Reformatory for a period of one year.

DORAY (*greatly concerned*). Oh, now, wait a minute, Judge. Excuse my butting in, your Honor, but that dog didn't steal my chickens. He had nothing to do with it. (*To* ART.) Did he?

ART. No.

DORAY. See!

JUDGE. I'm not accusing the dog.

DORAY. Then why make him suffer for something he never did? (*With feeling—pointing at the dog.*) Now put yourself in the dog's place. How would you like to be locked up for something you weren't to blame for? He can't help it because he's a poor little mut.

JUDGE. I'm very sorry, Mr. Doray, but I cannot separate him from his master. (*To* ART, *kindly.*) Arthur, I will ask the superintendent of the Reformatory to let you see your dog thirty minutes each day. The rest of the time he will be kept in a cage.

DORAY (*rising*). In a cage? Why don't you shoot the damn dog and be done with it? (JUDGE *raps with gavel.*)

I beg your pardon. Here, give him to me. (*Takes dog—holds him affectionately.*) In a cage, the very idea! I'm going to give him a home. Hello, Bobbie old boy. How's your whiskers? Say, what is he, a Moravian mouse-hound?

NUTTY. Naw, he's a cat-hound.

EDITH. Come, Arthur, we'll give you a home, too.

ART. It's awful good of you, Mrs. Doray, but I guess I better go to the Reform School. But you're right about my dog, I don't want him shut up in no cage—you just give him a home and I'll be all right. Thanks just the same. Good-bye, Bob. (*Lays his cheek against dog's head.*)

DORAY. Oh, Judge, I guess I'll need a boy to take care of the dog and look after my chickens. Can I take him?

NUTTY. Sure. Go ahead, Art, before he changes his mind. Can I come and see him some time?

EDITH. Yes, do.

(*Exchange of looks between* NUTTY *and* DORAY.)

NUTTY. How about you, Mr. Doray?

(DORAY *crosses to* NUTTY.)

DORAY. Oh, I guess so.

NUTTY. Good. I'll see ye later, Art.

EDITH. Good-bye, Judge.

JUDGE. Good-bye, Mrs. Doray.

DORAY. Good-bye, Judge.

JUDGE. Good-bye, Mr. Doray.

NUTTY. So long, Bob. (*Backs into the* JUDGE. *Turns, grins.*) See, Judge—didn't I tell yer Art didn't steal dem chickens!

CURTAIN

THE PRAIRIE DOLL

BY

EDWARD CHILDS CARPENTER

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Edward Childs Carpenter was born in Philadelphia on December 13, 1872. From his earliest youth his ambition was to write plays. He began by reading all the old published dramas, but that did not satisfy him: he wanted to know how they were managed in production. So he decided to go on the stage. He played in stock and repertoire companies and eventually became a director. Like all beginners he had great difficulty in getting a start with New York producers. He had to live, so he turned his pen to writing short stories and novels and became a newspaper man. While holding down his job as Financial Editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* he wrote all his novels and many of his earlier plays. His novels were *The Chasm* written in collaboration with another newspaper man Reginald Wright Kaufman; *Captain Courtesy* and *The Code of Victor Jallot.* The last two he afterward turned into plays. *The Dragon Fly* written in collaboration with John Luther Long was the first play he had presented under his own name. Other plays that followed were *The Barber of New Orleans* played by William Faversham; *The Tongues of Men* with Henrietta Crosman and Frank Gillmore. Later came *The Cinderella Man* which played a memorable season at the Hudson Theater, a year in London and subsequently all over the world in many languages, and is still active among the country's stock companies. This was followed by *The Three Bears* and *The Pipes of Pan.* The latter Mr. Carpenter regards as his best play. *Bab* a dramatization of Mary Roberts Rinehart's stories served well to introduce Helen Hayes as a star.

He has been for many years interested in bettering the conditions under which authors write for the theater. He has long been on the council of The Authors' League of America; he has served as chairman of the board of The Dramatists' Guild, and for two years was president of that organization.

Published plays: *The Cinderella Man; Bab; The Prairie Doll; The Three Bears.*

CHARACTERS

ALBERTA BRADLEY, *owner of the Green Basin Ranch.*

DOUGLAS QUARRIER, *chief engineer of the Green Basin Land & Irrigation Co.*

GEORGE PRENTISS, *representing Prentiss & Meigs, bankers, promoters of the Irrigation Company.*

SCENE: *A camp.*

TIME: *The present.*

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THE PRAIRIE DOLL

QUARRIER'S *camp, overlooking a stretch of the desert near the Green Basin Ranch, Arizona.*

Great boulders and towering rocks, bearing sparse foliage, mask in the entrances on either side of the stage.

A large tent is set up Right, its opening facing the Left lower side of the stage, its back hidden by the rocky wings. A lantern hangs on the tent pole. A pile of baggage, camp stools, blue prints, blankets, a saddle and the paraphernalia of an engineer, are scattered about the stage. Down stage a camping outfit, pot, kettle, pan, bucket, fire-wood, axe, etc.

It is late in the afternoon.

As the curtain rises DOUGLAS QUARRIER *is seen stowing away his luggage in the tent. He is about 35 years old, good-looking, well-built, alert, brisk, forceful, but courteous. He wears a soft shirt with a rolling collar, khaki trousers, boots and felt hat.*

After a moment GEORGE PRENTISS *enters Left. He is a young man about 25, dressed in a striped silk shirt, a collar of the same material, four-in-hand tie, English riding breeches, tan riding-boots, small spurs, Stetson wide-brimmed hat; neat and fresh, except for the dust on his hat and the wet mud on his boots. He is the son of* PRENTISS, *of Prentiss & Meigs, promoters of the Irrigation Company.*

PRENTISS (*rushing up to* QUARRIER, *greeting him with boyish enthusiasm*). Hello, Mr. Quarrier!

QUARRIER (*shaking* PRENTISS' *hand cordially*). How are you, Prentiss!

PRENTISS. Gad, but I'm glad to see you. When did you blow in?

QUARRIER. Half an hour ago! A greaser drove me over, dumped me down here and invited me to bunk in your tent!

PRENTISS. Yes! I thought you'd rather be with me than with the foreman—that's his camp down there!

QUARRIER. Sure! But I'd bunk with a Hottentot for the sake of engineering this job!

PRENTISS. Of course you've only seen the plans—but how does it strike you?

QUARRIER. It ought to turn out the best irrigation project that ever came across the prairie! But I hear the work's been badly bungled so far.

PRENTISS. I should say so! Coleman, the engineer in charge, was a duffer.

QUARRIER. God bless the duffer! His failure has handed me the one thing in the world I want most to do!

PRENTISS. Father knew you were the man for this stunt!

QUARRIER (*looking across the desert*). Oh, it's a real man's work—to irrigate the desert—the desert that's lain asleep since the Almighty made her bed. . . . How are things going?

PRENTISS. Rottenly! The river has risen in the canyon. If it rises much further, the temporary dam won't hold; and if it breaks it'll sweep through the gorge and wipe the Green Basin Ranch right off the map!

QUARRIER. What of that? Isn't the Green Basin the site for our reservoir?—We'd have to clear it out one way or another!

PRENTISS. It's a rather curious situation: Father bought the Ranch from a man named Lester, the trustee of the Bradley estate that owns the ranch. We paid $5,000 down, 10 per cent. of the purchase price—the balance to be paid when the Ranch was vacated. And it was understood that we wouldn't begin work there until the outfit had had time to move.

QUARRIER. Haven't they moved out yet?

PRENTISS. No! They're waiting for Miss Bradley to come home.

QUARRIER. Miss Bradley—who's she?

PRENTISS. The estate—she is! It's her property. She's not come of age yet!

QUARRIER. Where is she?

PRENTISS. I haven't met her. She's been off on the range for a couple of months rounding up her cattle!

QUARRIER (*amazed*). What?

PRENTISS. Oh she's the boss of the ranch, all right! They say she's as tame as a wildcat! And as wise as a baby!

QUARRIER. Quite a combination. A woman of that type is likely to make trouble for us. She'll probably take her time about vacating.

PRENTISS. Don't worry—I'll be able to handle her! (*Going into tent.*) I've got a nice little present for her!

(*Reënters from tent with a large pasteboard dry-goods box, opens it and shows to* QUARRIER. *The box contains all sorts of the dantiest lingerie, and a little white summer dress with a full skirt.*)

QUARRIER (*gasping*). Good Lord!

PRENTISS. A nice little summer dress and things! You know these prairie dolls fall for that sort of stuff!

QUARRIER (*laughing*). Most women do! . . . I think I'll stroll over to the foreman's tent and have a heart-to-heart talk with him. It wouldn't be a bad scheme if you went over to the Ranch and warned those people they're in danger of being flooded out—and see if that girl's got home!

(QUARRIER *goes out.*)

PRENTISS. All right—just as soon as I've changed my boots. They're sopping!

(PRENTISS *goes into the tent. In a moment the sun begins to set.* ALBERTA BRADLEY *enters. She is young, good-looking, healthy, charming. She is tanned and tawny; dressed like a cow-boy; wears hairless leather "chaps" of precisely the same color as the corduroy trousers they protect; a faded flannel shirt, once brown but now tawny; a wide-brimmed felt hat that completely covers her hair, which is braided*

and wound about the crown of her head; high-heeled boots, spurs, a cartridge belt, a pistol hanging at her hip. Her manner is simple, direct, natural, boyish, impetuous. She looks like a handsome youth of twenty and acts like one. She is hot and angry. She pauses and stares at the tent for a moment.)

ALBERTA (*calling sharply*). Heigh! Heigh! Any o' you coyotes—come on out! I'm just naturally goin' to give you the worst licking you ever got!

PRENTISS (*coming from tent with a pair of clean boots in his hand*). What's the row?

ALBERTA (*approaching him*). You belong to this hyere engineerin' outfit?

PRENTISS (*approaching her with wonder*). Y-e-s!

ALBERTA. Then you keep your dagos off the Green Basin Ranch, or I'll skin the whole tribe of 'em and use their hides for breeches!

PRENTISS (*laughs*). Well I'm hanged, a girl!

ALBERTA. Heigh! If you're spoiling for a skinning, I'd just as soon begin with you!

PRENTISS. Oh, no—I'm too fond of my skin—don't begin with me—start with the boss!

ALBERTA. Then fade away, Bub, and trot out the chief! I've got to make it mighty plain to him—I won't have any trespassing on my ranch!

PRENTISS. Lord! You're not Miss Bradley, are you?

ALBERTA. Hah! I expect I am! But nobody calls me "Miss." I'm Bert Bradley—I am!

PRENTISS (*with a bow*). Oh! Permit me to introduce myself: George Prentiss, representing Prentiss & Meigs, promoters of the Irrigation Company!

ALBERTA (*hotly*). If you-all care for your health, you and your company'll hit the home trail!

PRENTISS. I'm awfully sorry—but the Green Basin Ranch belongs to us!

ALBERTA. Who in blazes is "Us"?

PRENTISS. The Green Basin Land & Irrigation Co. We bought that ranch from a man named Lester, trustee of the Bradley estate; and he'll tell you all you want to know about it!

ALBERTA (*astonished*). Lester sold you-all that ranch?

PRENTISS. Sure! He'll tell you all about it.

ALBERTA (*hotly*). You *bet* he'll tell me all about it!

PRENTISS (*pulling on his boots*). You talk as though he hadn't a right to sell it!

ALBERTA. A right? No! No more than you. He has plumb nerve, he has! It's *my* ranch! Mine! Do you savvy? And I won't stand for the sale!

PRENTISS. It puts us all in an awkward position.

ALBERTA. Lie down, Bub! There ain't going to be any trouble for me over this deal—it's just naturally going to be called off, or I'll begin tearing things up around hyere——

PRENTISS. Do you mind telling me what you are?

ALBERTA. I'm the boss of the Green Basin Ranch!

PRENTISS. I know that; but are you really a girl?

ALBERTA. What do you think I am?—a grasshopper?

PRENTISS. Jove, you're wonderful!

ALBERTA. Ah, come down off your bronc! (*Turns away from him.*)

PRENTISS. Come down yourself, and listen to me!

ALBERTA (*turns and looks at him searchingly*). Huh! You think you're some sizable—eh?

PRENTISS. I was *thinking*—I don't know that it could be done—but if there's anything irregular about the sale of your ranch, I'll try to make it right!

ALBERTA (*squatting cross-legged on the ground*). Now you're shouting!

PRENTISS (*squatting beside her*). It all depends upon Quarrier!

ALBERTA. Who's Quarrier? (*Takes off hat and shakes down hair.*)

PRENTISS. He's the new engineer in charge—the boss of the job. I'll talk it over with him if you like.

ALBERTA (*ominously*). You'd better! (*Shaking her hair.*) Doggone this mane, I'd like to chop it off!

PRENTISS. It would be a shame, but why don't you?

ALBERTA. Oh, I dunno—I just naturally don't—(*begins to braid her hair*)—same as I don't cut Smoke's tail!

PRENTISS. Who's Smoke?

ALBERTA. My pony! I wish I'd rode him over hyere so you could see how—(*with enormous affection*) purty he is—my Smoke? Ah!

PRENTISS. Very fond of him—eh?

ALBERTA. There ain't another little hoss like him in this hyere country. He's—he's my baby!

PRENTISS. And no doubt a very clever child!

ALBERTA. He's got more sense than any man I ever knew, exceptin' my Dad, and Fat Old Goliad-Sam!

PRENTISS. Fat Old Goliad-Sam?

ALBERTA. He's—(*laughing softly*)—he's my—buddie.

PRENTISS. What's that?

ALBERTA. My pal.

PRENTISS (*amazed and tickled*). Well, I'll be— How long has this—er—buddie business been going on?

ALBERTA. Almost ever since I was big enough to stick on a hoss and ride the range. Fat Old Goliad-Sam's been my buddie. First Dad was. (PRENTISS *laughs.* ALBERTA *laughs softly.*) You'd a-laughed if you'd seen my Dad bluff he was jealous of Sam!

PRENTISS (*moving closer and looking straight at her*). I hope you don't mind my saying you're perfectly stunning!

ALBERTA (*looking him over*). No, I expect you're just naturally foolish!

PRENTISS (*edging up to her confidentially*). If I'm foolish, it's about you!

ALBERTA (*indulgently*). I allow you're a pretty nice kid!

PRENTISS (*feels he has made an impression and seeking to clinch it*). I'd do anything in the world for you!

(PRENTISS *sneaks his hand over* ALBERTA'S. *She permits him to take her hand, but slowly closes her muscular fingers*

around his, and smilingly squeezes them until she hurts him.)

PRENTISS (*wincing*). Ouh! Let—up, will you!

ALBERTA (*laughing and still crunching his hand in hers as they rise*). What's ailing you, Bub?

PRENTISS (*rising on his knees and squirming with pain*). For the sake of— (*Crying out.*) Oh, oh, oh! Let go—you—you——

ALBERTA (*enjoying his pain, still squeezing his hand*). Hah! Hah!

PRENTISS (*writhing in pain*). You—you're breaking my bones!

ALBERTA (*laughing and letting go his hand*). Hurt your feelings?

PRENTISS (*furious at her, nursing his hand*). You confounded little brute! I don't believe you've got any feelings!

ALBERTA. I guess I've got all the insides anybody has!

PRENTISS. No you haven't! You're a bully! That's what you are, a bully! (*Advances toward her threateningly.*) And if you weren't a girl, I'd give you a good, swift punch in the jaw!

ALBERTA (*rolling up her sleeves*). Come on, Bub! I reckon I'm as much a man as you'll ever be you little milk-fed dude!

PRENTISS. On second thought, I'll leave you to Quarrier—and go about my business—— (*Goes off to one side.*)

ALBERTA. Huh! Scairt o' me—ain't you?

PRENTISS. Not a bit! I'm afraid of *him!* He told me half an hour ago to run over to your ranch—warn your people that the dam's liable to break and flood you out!

ALBERTA (*not believing him*). Huh! You can't buffalo me! Nothing like that's liable to happen to my ranch!

PRENTISS. Why don't you call me a liar and be done with it?

ALBERTA. You're a liar!

PRENTISS (*bristling for a moment; then sullenly*). All right! You know it all! But I hope—I pretty nearly pray—that the dam will break——

ALBERTA (*ominously*). If it does, Bub— (*Touching gun.*)

Somebody's goin' to get laid out cold!

PRENTISS (*going*). And you're just fool enough to shoot first and think about it afterward!

ALBERTA. I'm sure quick on the trigger and liable to get results!

PRENTISS. You'll get yours! Go on—get gay with Quarrier! I dare you! He'll take you by the scruff of the neck and wipe up the desert with you! (*He goes out.*)

ALBERTA (*calling after him*). When I get used for a broom, your boss won't be the handle! Pike out, you gun-shy pup! Pike while the piking's good!

(*She turns, goes up to the tent, looks in, turns from tent, kicks at the blue-prints in front of the tent.* QUARRIER *enters. Pauses as he sees* ALBERTA. *She looks down at him belligerently.*)

QUARRIER. Hello, m'son! What can I do for you?

ALBERTA (*looking him over*). You can do a whole lot for me—if you'll tell me where's the boss of this hyere irrigation outfit!

QUARRIER. What do you want with him?—a job?

ALBERTA (*sarcastically*). No—I don't want a job! (*Warmly.*) I just want to lick the stuffin' out of the son-of-a-gun!

QUARRIER (*laughing*). Belligerent little cuss, aren't you!

ALBERTA. Oh, I can cuss!

QUARRIER (*laughing*). I dare say! (*Amused.*) So you're spoiling for a scrap?

ALBERTA. I sure am!

QUARRIER (*approaching her*). But the boss of this irrigation outfit is a bigger man than you are, m'son!

ALBERTA. I don't care how big he is—I'll bet you I'll just naturally pulverize him!

QUARRIER (*closer to her—amused*). Before I take your bet, I'd like to feel your muscle!

ALBERTA. Oh, I've got muscle a-plenty! (*Rolls up her sleeve and makes her biceps swell.*)

QUARRIER (*looking at her arm, looking at her arm and then at her face, with sudden astonishment*). Good Lord!—a girl!

ALBERTA (*tartly*). Can I help that?

QUARRIER (*amazed and amused*). Bless my soul!

ALBERTA. Never mind saying your prayers! Tell me where I can find Quarrier!

QUARRIER. He isn't very far off! But he isn't worth bothering about! (*Gaily, good-naturedly.*) You're about the cutest thing I've seen in a blue moon! (*Laughs.*) Chaps and gun! All dressed up to kill, aren't you?

ALBERTA. Shucks! This is nothing! When I'm bugged up proper, I wear *two* guns!

QUARRIER. I suppose that's the style this spring! Let's have a thorough look at you! (*Laughingly, he lays a hand on her to turn her to the light.*)

ALBERTA (*warningly, as she withdraws a step from him*). Don't you get too playful with me—or I'll make you look like two-bits of God-help-us!

QUARRIER (*mockingly*). Gosh! I'm frightened to death! (*Approaches her, looking at her whimsically.*)

ALBERTA (*hand on pistol, backing off a step*). Touch me, and I'll plug you where it'll do the most good!

QUARRIER (*laughing*). Affectionate little thing! (*Advances closer.*)

ALBERTA (*presenting her gun in a flash*). Throw up your hands!

QUARRIER (*humorously*). What's the use? You've gone through me already?

ALBERTA (*disconcerted*). Huh! I haven't taken anything off you—yet!

QUARRIER (*in his most charming manner*). Far be it from me to contradict a lady—a lady at once so charming and so ferocious—nevertheless, I repeat it to my shame, you have gone clear through me! (*Touches his heart and looks into her eyes with a winning smile.*)

ALBERTA (*rather won by him, but confused and puzzled*). You're plumb locoed, you are!

QUARRIER. I should think I was! I've heard of prairie dolls,

but I never met one, until—now! Welcome! Make yourself right at home!

(*She looks at him wonderingly, not knowing what to make of him.*)

By Jove, you know—you lend a robust charm to my poor camp; the breath of the desert clings to you; you cast the spell of the wilderness about me! (*With a flourish, picking up a blanket.*) I am entertaining a princess of the waste-places, and I have nothing to offer her, but a—blanket! (*Spreads blanket, waves her to sit upon it.*)

ALBERTA (*sitting on blanket, and at last thrusting her gun, which she has all the while kept in her hand, into its holster*). I don't know what you're talkin' about, but I like the way you say it!

QUARRIER (*sitting beside her laughing*). You see, you inspire me! I don't know whether it's your eyes or—your gun! Anyway, my dear Eve——

ALBERTA. My name isn't Eve!

QUARRIER (*in comic surprise*). No?

ALBERTA. It's Bert!

QUARRIER. Bert what?

ALBERTA. Alberta Bradley!

QUARRIER (*in genuine surprise*). Oh, you're the beneficiary of the Bradley estate!

ALBERTA. I *am* the estate! Who are you?

QUARRIER (*with a laugh*). Now, don't shout! My name's Quarrier!

ALBERTA (*rising suddenly and backing away from him, angrily*). Quarrier? The boss of this hyere irrigation outfit?

QUARRIER (*rising*). Yes!

ALBERTA (*with hot defiance*). You can't have my ranch for any mud puddle!

QUARRIER (*amazed*). Can't have your ranch?

ALBERTA. No, siree!

QUARRIER. But I don't [illegible] your ranch any longer—your trustee sold it!

ALBERTA. I don't have to take any account of what he does now! I came of age pretty near a year ago! The ranch is mine—and I won't sell! Lester'll have to give you back your roll!

QUARRIER. We can't take the money back. We've got to have your ranch!

ALBERTA. You'll get my ranch—when grizzly bears wear bonnets!

QUARRIER. But you forget, you're getting $50,000 for that property!

ALBERTA. I ain't wanting your coin! I want my ranch, and I'm some certain I'm going to keep it!

QUARRIER. Come now, Miss Bradley, be reasonable! We bought the property in good faith—you must know that we are committed to irrigate this particular tract; while you could take the money and go anywhere—see the world!

ALBERTA. I ain't got any interest in seein' the world! My Dad was raised out there where you come from, and he told me it wasn't fittin' to live in. I'd be nothin' but a tenderfoot out yonder! Hyere I'm boss of a big ranch! I know the cattle, the cow-punchers, the canyons, the desert—I'm plumb crazy 'bout 'em! They're my friends! (*Waving her hand over the desert.*) This hyere-all's my home!

QUARRIER. But you will have to go—you and your cattle, just as the Indians and buffaloes before you. Civilization is coming into the wilderness!

ALBERTA (*coldly, with a threat in her voice*). "Civilization" is sure loading hisself full o' trouble if he brings his outfit into *my* wilderness. By heck—(*touching gun*)—I'll perforate 'em proper!

QUARRIER (*smiling*). And would you treat *me* like that?

ALBERTA (*quietly, steadily, without anger; even a tinge of regret in her voice*). I reckon I'd just—have to!

QUARRIER. And I've got to bring civilization into your wilderness!

ALBERTA (*with a note of admiration in her voice*). You-all

look like you would—even if you had to go clean through hell! But I warn you—you're goin' to find it plenty hot!

QUARRIER (*amiably*). That being the case, we might as well begin by being friends! (*Turns to the tent and picks up box of clothing.*)

ALBERTA. Somehow, I can't just size you up! We're enemies—and I've got to hate you like poison!

QUARRIER (*coming to her with the box*). We won't worry about that—now! Look here! This is a little present we've got for you!

ALBERTA (*her curiosity awakened*). A present—for me?

QUARRIER (*setting box on blanket before her, where the moonlight falls brightly*). Yes!

(ALBERTA *drops on her knees and opens the box.*)

ALBERTA (*bending over the box, picking up a piece of lingerie.*) Something to wear, I reckon—eh?

QUARRIER. Lingerie!

ALBERTA. Lin-ger-ie? (*Examines a piece*) It's almighty soft and— (*Sniffing it*)—sweet-smelly; and it's sure beautiful! I—I never saw anything so—so—plumb lovely! (*Suddenly, to* QUARRIER.) Do you wear duds like these?

QUARRIER. Good Lord, no! Women wear them!

ALBERTA. I expect they look mighty purty in 'em—don't they?

QUARRIER. How should I know?

ALBERTA. Don't you hail from civilization where they sport—(*struggling with the word*)—lingerie?

QUARRIER. Yes! But—I'm a bachelor!

ALBERTA. What of that?

QUARRIER. To a bachelor those things are hallowed in mystery!

(ALBERTA *looks up at him puzzled.*)

ALBERTA. Oh, you wear 'em next to you?

QUARRIER (*with a sigh of comic relief*). You've caught the idea!

ALBERTA (*holding up a piece of lingerie*). Do all the female women you know wear lin-ger-ies?

QUARRIER. I think I'm safe in saying that they do.

ALBERTA. What good are these hyere ribbons, these bow-knots? They're just stuck on—they don't *do* anything; and I allow they wouldn't show!

QUARRIER. My instinct tells me that every real woman likes her clothes to be pretty even where it doesn't show.

ALBERTA (*softly, in wonderment*). Don't that beat—hell! (*Fondling the lingerie. Pause—then wistfully.*) But they-all are no use to me! Shucks! I can't see myself all bugged up in these—(*softly*)—doggone purty things. (*Wistfully.*) I—I expect I just naturally couldn't wear 'em under my chaps, could I?

QUARRIER. They weren't meant to be worn under chaps!

ALBERTA. No—not under chaps!

QUARRIER (*searching in the box*). You could wear them under this dress! (*Shows her white summer dress.*)

ALBERTA (*wistfully*). I wasn't raised up to wear such purty, tom-fool fixin's!

QUARRIER. But it isn't too late—you could begin wearing them—now!

ALBERTA (*excitedly*). You think it'd be all right for me—now?

QUARRIER. Surely!

(ALBERTA *suddenly starts to pull her shirt off over her head.*)

QUARRIER (*laughingly stopping her*). For Mike's sake!

ALBERTA (*unbuckling her gun belt*). But you said I could! And you've got me plumb crazy to—to see how—how it'd feel to be all bugged up in those things! (*Tosses off gun belt and gun.*)

QUARRIER (*picking up box and handing it to her*). Then, go ahead—take my tent! You'll find a looking-glass there!

ALBERTA (*fairly snatching box from him and running to tent*). If this job stumps me, you'll have to lend a hand! (*Dives into the tent.*)

QUARRIER. If the worst comes to the worst—I might do a little hooking up the back!

ALBERTA (*breathlessly from within tent*). What's hookin' up the back?

QUARRIER. For some mysterious reason, women don't fancy buttons—they prefer an invention of the devil called hooks-and-eyes; and they have their clothes fasten up the back—just to give other people the privilege of dressing them!

ALBERTA (*within tent*). Then I reckon you ought to be dressin' me!

QUARRIER (*laughing, as he fills his pipe*). I would!—cheerfully!—only bachelors do not dress ladies!

ALBERTA (*within tent*). Why don't they!

QUARRIER (*lighting pipe*). Well—it isn't done—at least not in civilization!

ALBERTA (*within tent*). Civilization has certainly got some mighty pe-cul-iar rules! If you were married to me, you'd dress me—would you?

QUARRIER. I suppose I'd have to, if I were married to *you!*

ALBERTA (*within tent*). Then it's lucky I can dress myself—isn't it?

QUARRIER. Why do you say that? (*He takes up* ALBERTA'S *gun-belt, examines gun, lays it down on top of sack in a conspicuous place.*)

ALBERTA (*within tent*). Cause there isn't a chance o' your marrying me!

QUARRIER. Oh, there isn't?

ALBERTA (*in tent*). Not a chance! Gee, but these lin-ger-ies feel bully. (*Laughs.*) How do you fix these ribbons?

QUARRIER. Don't you dare consult me!

ALBERTA (*in tent*). And say, do I put on one or two of 'em? It'll take a heap of 'em to keep me warm—they're so thin you can see right through 'em! (*Laughs gleefully.*)

QUARRIER. I think you'd better trust to your own instinct!

ALBERTA (*in tent*). You mean like when I get lost on the prairie!

QUARRIER. That's it!

ALBERTA (*in tent*). But I'm lost in these hyere duds more

than I ever was in the desert! I wish those rules of yours was off—so you would help a feller!

QUARRIER. How far are you along?

ALBERTA (*in tent*). I'm pretty well covered up!

QUARRIER. What I want to know is: what you meant when you said there—er—wasn't a chance of my marrying you!

ALBERTA. Oh—cause my Dad told me never to marry anybody. He said men were no good! So he tried to make a real sure-enough man out o' me!

QUARRIER. Do you think he succeeded?

ALBERTA (*laughing*). I used to think I was a purty sizable man—but Gee! you wait a second till I get into this hyere dress complete! I don't know what the heck I am, anyway!

QUARRIER. I shouldn't wonder if you were going to show me that you're a sure-enough woman!

ALBERTA. Darn this pesky hook! . . . Say, I'm about all in! Help!

(ALBERTA *suddenly enters from tent, fully dressed in a little, white summer gown with a billowy skirt, and without a hat. Only a few hooks in the back of the dress are unfastened. She looks charming. She pauses at the tent door, smiling, showing herself off to* QUARRIER, *like a delighted child.*)

QUARRIER (*thunderstruck at the charm of her*). By Jove!

ALBERTA (*gleefully*). Ain't I togged up somethin' scandalous? Look like a regular party, don't I?

QUARRIER. You look like—Love, out for a holiday!

ALBERTA. Quit your funnin' and finish hitchin' me up the back! (*Turns her back to him.*) I did mighty good, didn't I?

QUARRIER (*beginning to hook her dress at back*). Marvelously!

ALBERTA. But I reckon I missed quite a few of 'em! Gee, but that's tight!

QUARRIER. Hold your breath!

ALBERTA. Say, put some muscle into it!

QUARRIER. There you are! (*Mops forehead.*) Phew!

ALBERTA. Thanks! (*Whirling about.*) Think I'm a regular woman now?

QUARRIER (*looking at her with admiration*). There isn't any doubt about it—a mighty attractive little woman, too. And I warn you, if you go around dolled up like that, every man you meet is bound to fall in love with you on sight!

ALBERTA. Hah! (*Parades.*) That won't bother me any!

QUARRIER. But the first thing you know, you're going to fall in love yourself!

ALBERTA. What o' that? I've fallen into a whole lot of things—and I haven't broke my neck yet!

QUARRIER. Have you ever met a man you thought you could like very much?

ALBERTA (*simply*). Oh, I dunno! I kind-a like your smile!

QUARRIER. What about me myself?

ALBERTA. I reckon I could like you yourself, a whole lot!

QUARRIER. Good Lord! You mean that?

ALBERTA (*simply*). Sure!

QUARRIER. This may be sudden, but I'm that kind of a man: I make up my mind in a minute! As you'd say, you've got me plumb crazy about you, and if you like me well enough, I'll marry you to-morrow!

ALBERTA (*looks at him wonderingly*). Marry—you?

(PRENTISS, *hatless and dishevelled, rushes in.*)

PRENTISS (*breathlessly*). Hi, Quarrier! The devil's to pay! (*Pauses, astonished at the sight of* ALBERTA.) Great Scott! That's not—? No! (*Realizing that it is* ALBERTA.) Holy mackerel!

QUARRIER (*sharply*). Yes, that's Miss Bradley! What's up—what's up?

PRENTISS (*stammering*). Why—why——

QUARRIER (*impatiently*). Out with it!

PRENTISS. Why—that temporary dam broke—swept away the Green Basin Ranch house—drowned half the cattle!

ALBERTA (*aghast*). Godfrey Mighty!

QUARRIER (*astounded*). What?

PRENTISS. They were [illegible] at the upper end of the basin—

in the first rush of the flood—oh, it's hell all right. I'm off for help! (*Starts to go out.*)

ALBERTA (*husky, scarcely able to speak*). What about—the hosses?—the hosses?

PRENTISS. We saved some of them—but a cow-puncher told me that—that your pet pony—Smoke—was washed up on the ridge—dead! . . . I told you you'd get yours! (*Runs out.*)

ALBERTA (*shocked, dazed, looking dumbly at* QUARRIER, *and then speaking slowly*). S-m-o-k-e!

QUARRIER. I'm sorry, Miss Bradley—dreadfully sorry——

ALBERTA (*overcome*). Smoke! Smoke! (*Her eye falls on her gun. Then with a sudden transition to fury.*) Damn you! You framed up this deal to flood me out! I'll show you! (*Snatches up gun in a frenzy of rage, half-sobbing.*) Damn you!

(*As* ALBERTA *is about to shoot,* QUARRIER *grasps her right wrist, makes her drop the gun; and as she strikes at him with her left fist, he catches her left wrist. Thus he holds her fast, while she thrashes about like a wild thing in a trap, kicking at him.*)

ALBERTA. You swine! . . . You wrecked my home! . . . Drowned my cattle! . . . Killed my hoss!

(QUARRIER *draws her to him, bends her arms behind her. They are now face to face, he holding her arms behind her. She looks into his face, and her expression of anger quickly changes and gives way to a look of intense admiration. She raises her chin the least little bit. There is no coquetry, no guile in this action: it is simply her sudden impulse, an expression of her love, now awakened.* QUARRIER *gently responds—kisses her. This kiss should be brief. Then he slowly releases her from his embrace, his hands pass down her arms with a caress, until they meet hers. He holds her hands, while she looks up at him, wide-eyed, breathless, bewildered.*)

QUARRIER (*with great tenderness, raising her hands and pressing them to his lips*). Forgive me! I've been a brute!

I've treated you like a man and you're just—(*with great affection—softly*)—a little prairie doll!

ALBERTA (*looking up at him adoringly*). You can have my ranch! (*Softly.*) You can have me!

CURTAIN

THE PASSING OF CHOW-CHOW

BY

ELMER L. RICE

ELMER L. RICE

Elmer L. Rice was born at New York City in 1892. Graduated from New York Law School in 1912, he was admitted to the bar the following year.

While still a student at Columbia, his first finished play, *On Trial*, was produced, and achieved a striking success. *Wake up Jonathan* (written in collaboration with Hatcher Hughes) was produced by Mrs. Fiske in 1921. *The Adding Machine*, produced by the Theatre Guild, and *Close Harmony* (in collaboration with Dorothy Parker) are so far his most important plays.

Published plays: *On Trial; The Adding Machine; The Home of the Free; The Passing of Chow-Chow.*

CHARACTERS

JAMES RUSSELL, *a lawyer*
WILLIAM, *an office-boy*
CORA WEBB STANDISH
ROBERT BRETT STANDISH, *her husband*

SCENE: *Russell's office.*

TIME: *The present.*

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THE PASSING OF CHOW-CHOW

The scene is RUSSELL'S *law-office in New York City.* RUSSELL *is seated at his desk. A moment after the curtain rises enter* WILLIAM, *the office-boy.*)

RUSSELL. What is it, William?

WILLIAM (*presenting card*). A lady to see you, sir.

RUSSELL. Ah, yes! You may show the lady in.

(WILLIAM *ushers in the lady*, MRS. STANDISH.)

MRS. STANDISH. Mr. Russell?

RUSSELL. Pray be seated, Mrs. Standish.

MRS. STANDISH. Thank you.

RUSSELL. Unless I am greatly in error, you are the daughter of my lamented friend, the late Cornelius Webb.

MRS. STANDISH. Yes.

RUSSELL. I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Standish. I had the honor of knowing your distinguished father quite well. A fine man.

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, it's through hearing Dad speak of you that I came here. You see—it's the first time I've needed a lawyer.

RUSSELL. You've been fortunate.

MRS. STANDISH. I—I—don't know just how to begin.

RUSSELL. Begin anywhere at all; we'll soon get at the facts. Lawyers aren't as formidable as you seem to think.

MRS. STANDISH. Well—you see ——

RUSSELL. Perhaps I can help you. You've had some difficulty with your husband?

MRS. STANDISH. Who told you?

RUSSELL. My dear Mrs. Standish, when a young married woman comes to a lawyer's office, alone and in tears, it is

fairly safe to assume that the placid seas of domesticity have become ruffled.

MRS. STANDISH. I suppose you see a great deal of unhappiness.

RUSSELL. Yes, we lawyers see nothing but sorrow and suffering. It's added a dozen years to my life. But proceed.

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, it's too terrible to talk about. After we were going to be so happy. And now he treats me like this! Oh, Mr. Russell, if you had heard his vows and protestations always to love me! . . . and—and——

RUSSELL. Don't take it to heart. All men say those things. It's human nature.

MRS. STANDISH. But Robert isn't like other men. And he said he'd go through fire and water for me—and—and—that he'd give up his life, before he'd let a single hair of my head be harmed. Those were his very words. I remember them distinctly.

RUSSELL. These sentimentalists! It's my opinion, Mrs. Standish, that sentimentality is the cause of——

MRS. STANDISH. And he said he'd pay with a drop of his blood for every tear he caused me to shed. And here I've been, crying all morning and—and—he's done nothing but use bad language.

RUSSELL. You must compose yourself, my dear lady. It's quite impossible for me to help you, unless you compose yourself.

MRS. STANDISH. Very well, I'll—I'll be quite calm.

RUSSELL. That's better. Now I'll have a stenographer in to take down your statement——

MRS. STANDISH. No, no, I couldn't bear that.

RUSSELL. Very well, I'll take it down myself, in long-hand.

MRS. STANDISH. Thank you. I shouldn't want anyone else to know.

RUSSELL. Oh, you must expect a certain amount of notoriety, you know. It's inevitable, considering your social position, and particularly so if the case is—ahem—at all sensational.

MRS. STANDISH. Do you mean that I'll have to go to court?

RUSSELL. Certainly. And besides that, as soon as the reporters get wind of the case, the newspapers will be full of it.

MRS. STANDISH. Newspapers! What business is it of theirs?

RUSSELL. None at all. That's the reason they'll be especially anxious to get all the details.

MRS. STANDISH. I call that nasty, vulgar impertinence.

RUSSELL. It's a matter of terms. The commoner one is "Freedom of the Press." So, as soon as the suit is filed in court, you'll be besieged by a small army of reporters, photographers, society-writers and Sunday-supplement editors. Your name will appear in type of varying degrees of boldness in every journal from Maine to California; your likeness will adorn the front page of, say, a half-dozen metropolitan papers; your——

MRS STANDISH. Oh, dear! And I always take such wretched pictures; they invariably make me look five years older than I am. It's on account of my being dark, you know—and then I never can smile when I'm looking into a camera. You have no idea how much difference that makes.

RUSSELL. Then you wish to proceed, despite the publicity?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, I must. I couldn't possibly go on living with him after his shameful conduct.

RUSSELL. Well, let's get at the facts. Your full name is——?

MRS. STANDISH. Cora Webb Standish.

RUSSELL. And your husband's?

MRS. STANDISH. Robert Brett Standish.

RUSSELL. When were you married?

MRS. STANDISH. A year ago, last June. Oh, Mr. Rusell, you can't imagine how happy we were—like babes in the wood. And now—and now——

RUSSELL. You mustn't distress yourself.—I beg of you not to distress yourself. Your husband, I believe, is an artist?

MRS. STANDISH. He paints.

RUSSELL. Just so. That brings us near the root of the matter, I suppose. Some fair-haired model, I've no doubt?

MRS. STANDISH. Model?

RUSSELL. Yes. Your husband, I assume, employs models.

MRS. STANDISH. Not at all: he's a landscape painter.

RUSSELL. Well, someone of the same sort, no doubt. I've noticed that when a man displays good taste in selecting a wife, his taste—in—other directions is usually singularly bad.

MRS. STANDISH. I—I don't quite follow——?

RUSSELL. Well—no matter—you know her name?

MRS. STANDISH. Whose name?

RUSSELL. The name of the—the lady in the case? The cause of your unhappiness; the other party——

MRS. STANDISH. Other party! Oh, Mr. Russell, how could you imagine such a thing? The very idea! If you only knew Robert!

RUSSELL. See here, Mrs. Standish, do I understand or do I not, that you wish to divorce your husband?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, of course I do. For the shameful way he's acted towards me. How could you think anything else?

RUSSELL. I beg your pardon: I misunderstood you. The mistake on the whole was a very natural one. I——

MRS. STANDISH. Natural one!

RUSSELL. Yes. I supposed your husband to be like other men.

MRS. STANDISH. But I told you that Robert *isn't* like other men.

RUSSELL. So you did. I had forgotten. Now do sit down and try to be calm.

MRS. STANDISH. You've made me feel queer all over.

RUSSELL. I'm sorry. . . . Now let's get at the facts. You say your husband has been ill-treating you?

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, indeed he has.

RUSSELL. Hasn't deserted you, has he?

MRS. STANDISH. Eh, I wonder if he has! He left the house this morning in a terrible rage.

RUSSELL. That won't do. Is your husband—er—addicted to liquor?

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, no, Robert never touches a drop. You don't think he has, do you, Mr. Russell?

RUSSELL. Has what?

MRS. STANDISH. Left me? He's so impulsive.

RUSSELL. I can't say. It would make your case much simpler if he had.

MRS. STANDISH. Would it?

RUSSELL. Yes. But let's be hopeful: he may, after all. Now tell me, has your husband struck you?

MRS. STANDISH. Struck me! Robert strike me! Oh, Mr. Russell!

RUSSELL. Well, what *has* he done?

MRS. STANDISH. He—he's abused Chow-Chow.

RUSSELL. Chow-Chow?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes. It's a dog.

RUSSELL. Oh!

MRS. STANDISH. The dearest little skye-terrier you ever saw. She has long, soft, silky hair, and big round eyes that seem to be asking you to love her, and the most pathetic little bark and——

RUSSELL. And your husband has been ill-treating this—er—animal?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, he disliked her, from the moment I bought her. He said she reminded him of an overgrown caterpillar. He says the most wicked things sometimes. And poor little Chow-Chow just begs to be loved. She's an orphan, you know. When she was ten days old, her mother was killed by an ambulance, and the week after that her father was vivisected. And once she got into the kitchen and almost lost one of her paws in the meat-chopper. As it was, her little foot was badly bruised.

RUSSELL. I suppose you acquainted your husband with these unfortunate incidents in the life of the animal in question?

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, yes, I told him about it, almost every day. But it only made him hate poor Chow-Chow more. Every time he'd pass an ambulance on the street, he'd take

off his hat and bow. And he said it was just his luck that Chow-Chow's mother wasn't killed eleven days sooner. And then, when Chow-Chow injured her paw, he wrote a poem, dedicated to the meat-chopper; and now he's taken the meat-chopper out of the kitchen, and put it on a cushion in his studio, tied with blue ribbon. And he closes the windows carefully every night, because, he says, he doesn't want the meat-chopper to catch cold.

RUSSELL. I see—a systematic course of persecution. Anything else?

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, yes! He leads Chow-Chow a miserable existence. He says the most sarcastic things to her; twits her about her weakness for candy and says sardonic things about dog-catchers and sausage-factories, right in her presence! And the poor thing whines in the most pitiable way. She's so sensitive! And then last summer, he said that he was sure she was getting the rabies, and that she'd bite him and he'd go about biting all his friends, and the thing would go on until the whole world was mad—all on account of Chow-Chow. And he hung placards in every room in the house, giving the address and telephone number of the Pasteur Institute. He said that people can never find a telephone-book in case of emergency. And every time Chow-Chow bit him, he pretended to have the rabies and barked and made the most hideous noises, until he almost frightened the poor dog out of her senses.

RUSSELL. Acts of wilful and malicious cruelty——

MRS. STANDISH. Then, once, he lied to me.

RUSSELL. Aha! Deceived you, did he?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes. He told me that an eminent scientist had discovered that violent deaths among animals are hereditary; and when I asked him the name of the scientist, he said he was his twin-brother. And Robert is an only child!

RUSSELL. Anything further? You said something about this morning——?

MRS. STANDISH. This morning was worst of all——

RUSSELL. Can I send for anything?

MRS. STANDISH. No, thank you, I'll be better in a moment. You see, I've never had an experience like this before.

RUSSELL. I can well imagine your agitation. You inherit your father's fineness of feeling.

MRS. STANDISH. About this morning. I was in the kitchen, giving instructions to cook. Suddenly, we heard the most frightful commotion upstairs. We rushed outside and there was Robert, at the head of the stairs, using the most terrible language. And then, we heard a heart-breaking, little yelp and my darling Chow-Chow came tumbling over the balustrade. Would you believe it, Mr. Russell, he'd kicked her downstairs? Oh, the cruel brute!

RUSSELL. Was she killed?

MRS. STANDISH. No, thank Heaven! Luckily, cook's head was in the way. That broke the fall. Of course I had the doctor up at once. He says there are no fractured bones, but he's not sure about internal injuries. And the poor little creature is a nervous wreck.

RUSSELL. Is she a valuable—er—animal?

MRS. STANDISH. I wouldn't part with her for all the money in the world. We've been through so much together. She was with me the first time Robert swore in my presence.

RUSSELL. Ah, I see—associations.

MRS. STANDISH. If she dies, I'll become a nun—or something.

RUSSELL. No, no, you must do nothing rash. Does your husband offer any explanation of his violent conduct?

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, he said something about his nasty old studio being upset. He was just looking for an excuse.

RUSSELL. Cruel and inhuman treatment; wilful and premeditated acts of brutality.

MRS. STANDISH. I don't think that any woman has ever suffered as much as I have, these past six months.

RUSSELL. Tell me, Mrs. Standish, is there no possibility of you and your husband patching up your difficulties?

MRS. STANDISH. Don't you think I have a case?

RUSSELL. Oh, yes, I think we shall be able to make out a good enough case. But being, if I may presume to say so, a friend of the family, I naturally take a personal interest in this case. And it has been my experience that reconciliation——

MRS. STANDISH. No, it's out of the question. After his conduct this morning I couldn't possibly live with him.

RUSSELL. Best not act too rashly. You know the old adage: "An ounce of prevention——"?

MRS. STANDISH. No, I won't lead a life of martyrdom for the best man on earth.

RUSSELL. Very well, if you are obdurate, there's nothing to do but to proceed with the case. I'll draw up the papers today.

MRS. STANDISH. Is that all?

RUSSELL. I think so.—(*The telephone rings. He answers it.*) Have the party wait——. There is one more question, Mrs. Standish.

MRS. STANDISH. Yes?

RUSSELL. Do you think it likely, in the event of your bringing this suit, that your husband would interpose any countercharge? It's always well to be prepared beforehand.

MRS. STANDISH. Of course not! He hasn't a single complaint to make. I've always humored and indulged him. In fact, I'm afraid I've spoiled him.

RUSSELL. Then we're safe on that score. Now that I think of it, there is a little affidavit I'd like you to sign. Would you mind waiting in here until it's prepared? I've someone waiting to see me. You can make yourself quite comfortable.

MRS. STANDISH. It won't take long, I hope. I'm awfully anxious to get home to my darling.

RUSSELL. Not fifteen minutes. The rest will do you good. (*She goes to another room. He takes up the telephone.*) Ask Mr. Standish to come in. (MR. STANDISH *enters.*)

STANDISH. Mr. Russell, I assume?

RUSSELL. Yes, sir. Have a chair, won't you?

STANDISH. My name's Standish. You've been recommended

to me by Mr. Upton, a mutual friend. My experience with lawyers has been limited. I may say that this is the first time I've been obliged to seek legal advice.

RUSSELL. I shall do my best to make your initial experience an agreeable one, Mr. Standish.

STANDISH. Thank you. The fact is, Mr. Russell, I have had —er—some slight domestic difficulty—indeed, I may say, rather serious domestic difficulty.

RUSSELL. Ah! Your wife——

STANDISH. Yes sir, I find it impossible to live with my wife any longer. I desire to become separated.

RUSSELL. Upon what grounds?

STANDISH. Upon the grounds, sir, that her affections have been alienated.

RUSSELL. Indeed!

STANDISH. Yes, sir, incredible as it may appear, it seems that I, her wedded husband whom she vowed to love and honor —love and honor, mind you!—am no longer deemed a worthy recipient of her affections. She has bestowed them elsewhere. Another has come between us.

RUSSELL. You surprise me, Mr. Standish.

STANDISH. I don't wonder. I could scarcely believe it myself, at first. I've been very patient, sir. I've watched the thing grow, in silence, reserving my judgment to a point beyond the limits of human credulity. "I mustn't be hasty," I told myself. "She is young; perhaps I'm not always entertaining; I've no right to be selfish." And so I waited. "It's a passing infatuation," I said. "Once its course is run, it will die out and things will go on smoothly again." But it hasn't died out, sir! On the contrary, it has increased steadily. It has assumed such alarming proportions that I, her husband, whom she promised to love and honor—love and honor!—I have become a mere domestic adjunct—nothing more, sir—a domestic adjunct!

RUSSELL. I'm sorry to hear it, Mr. Standish. And who, may I ask, is this despicable interloper?

STANDISH. Its name is Chow-Chow.

RUSSELL. Chow-Chow?

STANDISH. It's a dog — or perhaps I shouldn't say a dog. No, it would be unfair to the canine race to call that creature a dog. It's tongue is half as long as its body and it's soft all over like—a worm——

RUSSELL. But how——?

STANDISH. You are incredulous? You would be more astounded were you to see the beast, sir. And yet I tell you with all the solemnity of a man in whose mind there is a vivid picture of his wrecked home, that were it not for Chow-Chow I would not be here to-day.

RUSSELL. I infer, from what you have said, that your wife has been over-solicitous in her regard for the welfare of this —er—animal?

STANDISH. Over-solicitous! It's her one thought. Morning, noon and night, she's washing the brute or feeding her or dressing her. When Chow-Chow's napping, I daren't make a noise for fear of waking her. At night she sleeps in a crib next to my wife's bed, and if Chow-Chow cries at two in the morning, I must get up and see whether she's warmly covered. When I take her for an airing—that's one of my duties: she can't be trusted to a maid—I must wear a necktie to match her ribbons. And to think that at college I played on the 'varsity foot-ball team——

RUSSELL. And these acts, it seems, are purely voluntary on your part?

STANDISH. Voluntary! Are you married?

RUSSELL. No.

STANDISH. I thought not. Lucky man! Fight hard against it, Mr. Russell.

RUSSELL. I'm afraid we're wandering from the point. From what you've told me, I scarcely think you have a cause of action against your wife.

STANDISH. Oh, I haven't begun to tell you my grievances.

RUSSELL. There are other facts?

STANDISH. Other facts! It would take me all day to enumerate them.

RUSSELL. Proceed.

STANDISH. Well, you see, my studio's in the house. I'm a painter, you know. Shortly after the advent of Chow-Chow —it was a rainy day when we got her; no light at all—seems like Fate, almost—As I was going to say, every morning I'd come into my studio and find my brushes half-chewed. In the depths of my child-like innocence, I suspected rats. I hope the rats will forgive me for the things I said about them. Then one morning I discovered Chow-Chow in the very act.

RUSSELL. You told your wife of this?

STANDISH. Naturally. She told me that the "poor little thing was sharpening her teeth." She also called upon me to observe how Nature provided for the tiniest of her creatures. I think she quoted John Burroughs or somebody. I'm not sure about that. I was not quite calm.

RUSSELL. What did you do then?

STANDISH. I went outside and relieved my feelings. Then I returned to the studio and put my brushes on a high shelf. The next day Chow-Chow upset a can of turpentine. It smelt so that I couldn't work for a week. You will forgive my agitation, sir. The memory of these outrages is still fresh.

RUSSELL. How does it—that is, *she*—get into your studio?

STANDISH. The maids never remember to close the door. The beast has a way of lurking about the halls, awaiting her opportunity. She is possessed of demon-like intelligence.

RUSSELL. Why don't you keep your studio locked?

STANDISH. My wife won't have it locked. Says it reminds her of Bluebeard and makes her melancholy.

RUSSELL. Has anything else occurred?

STANDISH. I have a habit of leaving things lying about my studio, which I acquired in the Latin Quarter years ago. One day I left a new silk hat on the sofa. The next morning I found the hat with a litter of puppies inside and Chow-Chow standing guard over them. You know I call that sort of thing immoral.

RUSSELL. I confess, your experiences have been—er—rather unpleasant.

STANDISH. I called my wife to witness the crime, naturally expecting some sympathy. How unreasonable I was! After rhapsodizing over the puppies for half an hour—they looked like water-rats—she pointed out to me the beauties of the maternal instinct among the lower animals. Then I insisted upon removing the devilish brood, and in doing so accidentally dropped one of them. Thereupon I was severely bitten by Chow-Chow, and my wife informed me that the puppies were my brothers and sisters, that hence I was guilty of fratricide. She also demonstrated by appropriate references to Macbeth that I would shortly fall a victim to insomnia, and finally she declared that I bore the mark of Cain upon my brow. Look at me, Mr. Russell! Do I look like a murderer?

RUSSELL. No, I can't say that you do.

STANDISH. Thank you. I've endured this life for several months. But the climax came this morning. I'm through.

RUSSELL. Ah! Something occurred this morning?

STANDISH. Yes, sir, not four hours ago. For the past two weeks I had been working on a canvas. A sunset on the water it was—a very difficult bit of work. I had the devil's own time getting the colors right. I finished it early this morning, placed it against the wall to dry and went out for a stroll. I returned in about an hour, took off my valuable fur coat, which I bought the other day, flung it across a chair, and walked over to look at the painting. Would you believe it, sir! that unspeakable beast was calmly lapping the wet paint off the foreground! I know now why they call 'em lap-dogs. Two weeks' solid work gone to smash! The picture's ruined!

RUSSELL. That *was* disagreeable. But proceed, if you please.

STANDISH. There's nothing further. After I had recovered the use of my limbs, I hurled the brute downstairs. I guess I've done for it. But this ends it. To-day marks the close of my married life.

RUSSELL. Don't you think that when your justifiable indignation has subsided, you and your wife will be able to smooth things over?

STANDISH. Impossible!

RUSSELL. Now let me ask you, Mr. Standish: Is there any likelihood of your wife raising a counter-charge against you?

STANDISH. She couldn't if she wanted to! My conduct has always been exemplary, sir! I have catered to her every wish, patiently submitted to her vagaries. (*The telephone bell rings.* RUSSELL *answers it.*)

RUSSELL. Who? Oh, yes, I'll be there in a moment. (*To* STANDISH.) Will you excuse me for a few minutes, Mr. Standish? I shan't be more than five minutes. There's someone waiting to see me.

STANDISH. I'll wait.

RUSSELL. Thank you.

(*He goes out.* STANDISH *paces the room in evident perturbation. Suddenly he begins whistling the "Miserere," in a loud, shrill fashion, missing the time altogether and striking notes too high for him. While he is thus engaged, the door opens an inch or two. In the crevice appears the delicately-chiselled nose of* MRS. STANDISH. *Then the door opens wide and she comes hurriedly into the room.*)

MRS. STANDISH. Robert!

STANDISH. Cora! What are you doing here? Where did you come from?

MRS. STANDISH. I was in there, and I recognized the—the noise you were making——

STANDISH. Perhaps you'll tell me what *you're* doing here?

MRS. STANDISH. I'm here on business.

STANDISH. Business! In a lawyer's office! Have you no sense of shame?

MRS. STANDISH. Well, if you must know, I'm going to start a suit against you.

STANDISH. Suit? Against me? For what?

MRS. STANDISH. For a separation, of course—on the grounds of cruelty.

STANDISH. This is the last blow!

MRS. STANDISH. You needn't seem so surprised. You might have expected it. You don't think I'd continue to live with you after this morning? Do you know that Chow-Chow may not recover?

STANDISH. What! She's not dead?

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, you brute!

STANDISH. Mark my words! When I get home, I'll boil her alive—and eat her—bones and all!

MRS. STANDISH. That wouldn't surprise me. It would be quite consistent with your nature.

STANDISH. That's right! Call me a cannibal! It's about the only thing you haven't accused me of.

MRS. STANDISH. Don't raise your voice to me; I'm not your wife any longer!

STANDISH. So you're going to get a separation? And the romance that began in a Venetian gondola is to end in an American court-room. I remember the day we were married: we were on the Grand Canal. "Bobbie, we're going to have a life-time of happiness." I think we even arranged to die on the same day, because neither of us could bear the thought of surviving the other. A life-time of happiness! One year and seven months! Do you hear me? One year and seven months!

MRS. STANDISH. And you said, "Darling, if I ever raise my voice to you, I'll be the worst scoundrel on earth."

STANDISH. We were going to wander through life like two children, holding each other's hands and laughing and picking flowers and all that sort of thing. Nothing could ever separate us. And now - now, we are separated by a thing with four rudimentary legs and a tail. . . . Don't cry like that or you'll have a headache and a red nose.

MRS. STANDISH. You wouldn't care. For all you care, I could have a green nose, and—and blue teeth!

STANDISH. Don't say dear. You know that isn't so. Nothing I've ever done can have led you to believe that.

MRS. STANDISH. You've no feelings. I could sit here and cry my eyes out and you wouldn't try to prevent me.

STANDISH. Don't cry, darling.

MRS. STANDISH. Don't touch me! A man who could treat a dumb creature——

STANDISH. Dumb creature! She kept me awake all last night with her infernal yelping.

MRS. STANDISH. That's right! Swear at me! I'm only your wife.

STANDISH. You're a bit upset, Cora.

MRS. STANDISH. You'd be upset, too, if you'd seen poor Chow-Chow suffering. Oh, how could you be so cruel!

STANDISH. You must admit that I had some justification.

MRS. STANDISH. Justification!

STANDISH. Great Heavens, yes! She ruined my "Sunset on the Water"!

MRS. STANDISH. Poor thing! That's her reward for paying you a compliment.

STANDISH. Eh?

MRS. STANDISH. Don't you understand? She mistook the painted water in the foreground of the picture for real water, and tried to lap it up.

STANDISH. Do you really think so?

MRS. STANDISH. Of course.

STANDISH. That never occurred to me.

MRS. STANDISH. You see—how hasty you are.

STANDISH. Well, there are other things, too. That incident of the puppies, for example.

MRS. STANDISH. That was your fault.

STANDISH. My fault!

MRS. STANDISH. You told me yourself that you let go her leash.

STANDISH. But, hang it, a man can't fill his pipe——

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, Robert! You know how she dislikes smoking.

STANDISH. I thought a whiff or two in the open air——

MRS. STANDISH. Don't you feel guilty, Robert?

STANDISH. Well, perhaps I was a bit rough——

MRS. STANDISH. There, I knew you'd be sorry.

STANDISH. It's just temper, you know—nothing more.

MRS. STANDISH. Of course it is. I know that your heart is big and soft. Once you see things in the right light——

STANDISH. I *am* a thick-skull.

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, Robert, if you knew how I've suffered!

STANDISH. I could kick myself for it. But it's all over now, isn't it?

MRS. STANDISH. I hope so.

STANDISH. Oh, you know it is.

MRS. STANDISH. And now tell me what you're doing here?

STANDISH. I—why—er—oh, I see! You mean what I'm doing in the office here—is that it?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes.

STANDISH. Well—you see—I was afraid you might be offended—so—so—I—that is—you understand.

MRS. STANDISH. No, I don't.

STANDISH. Why, of course you do. The fact is, I was worried about you. So that when you left the house——

MRS. STANDISH. How did you know I left the house?

STANDISH. Why, I saw you, of course. I was standing across the street—behind a tree, so that you couldn't see me. When I saw you leave the house, I said to myself, "I wonder where she's going. I'd better follow her, in case of danger; one reads of all sorts of things, these days." So I did.

MRS. STANDISH. But I came down in a taxi.

STANDISH. Certainly. And I was right behind you in another taxi. We had the hardest time keeping you in sight, on account of the heavy traffic. Almost lost you several times, but I kept my fist under the driver's nose, and he broke one police regulation after another. Once I think we knocked someone down, but I was thinking only of you, and told the driver to go ahead. Then when I saw you come up here, why naturally I followed you. Of course, I never suspected the nature of your errand.

MRS. STANDISH. It seems very strange.

STANDISH. Strange? Not at all. Why does it seem strange?

MRS. STANDISH. Because, before I came up here I telephoned to cook to find out about Chow-Chow's condition. She said you had just come back for your hat, which you forgot when you rushed out this morning, and that you were in the hall swearing at the umbrella-stand.

STANDISH. It isn't so! I stubbed my toe against the front door—that is—er——

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, Robert, you're not telling me the truth. You didn't follow me at all. You came here to get a separation! You know you did!

STANDISH. I didn't know what I was doing—I was mentally unbalanced. I'm subject to—to—temporary aberrations.

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, however could you! I've tried so hard to make you happy. I did everything to please you. I never said an unkind word to you——

STANDISH. Of course you didn't. I'm a cad, that's what I am. I ought to be hung. Forgive me, darling!

MRS. STANDISH. You didn't really mean to do it?

STANDISH. Mean it? I should say not!

MRS. STANDISH. If I thought you did——

STANDISH. You couldn't possibly think that. And now dry your eyes, dear, and give me a kiss.

MRS. STANDISH. I'm so happy!

STANDISH. Then you forgive me? (*A bell rings.*)

MRS. STANDISH. It's the telephone.

STANDISH. It's for Russell, I guess. Wonder where he is?

MRS. STANDISH. You'd better answer it and say he's not here.

STANDISH (*at telephone*). Hello, Mr. Russell's not here. Oh, who? Mrs. Standish? Yes—Yes, she's here. Who is this? Who? Oh, cook!

MRS. STANDISH. Oooh! Chow-Chow!

STANDISH. This is Mr. Standish, cook. Yes, Mr. Standish. What? You don't say so! When? Is that so! Yes—

Well, I'm glad of that, anyhow. Yes, that's right. Don't do anything. We'll be home soon. . . . Yes, Mrs. Standish and I. . . . In about half an hour—all right—good-bye.

MRS. STANDISH. Well?

STANDISH. My dear, be brave. The worst has happened.

MRS. STANDISH. Chow-Chow?

STANDISH. Yes, she breathed her last not ten minutes ago.

MRS. STANDISH. Poor little Chow-Chow!

STANDISH. The end was quiet; quiet but touching, cook said. Her last earthly act was to snap at cook's finger. How like her! Dear little Chow-Chow!

MRS. STANDISH. I feel twenty years older.

STANDISH. The sun seems to have lost its brightness.

MRS. STANDISH. You were right after all.

STANDISH. Right?

MRS. STANDISH. About violent death being hereditary.

STANDISH. My dear, can you ever forgive me?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, Robert, I forgive you. We cannot expect forgiveness for ourselves unless we forgive others. And besides, the doctor said then even if she recovered, she would suffer from chronic dyspepsia, as a result of the paint. So it's just as well as it is. And—and—somehow I never felt just the same towards her, after those puppies.

STANDISH. We must give her a fitting funeral.

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, she would have loved that. She always barked at hearses.

STANDISH. I'll attend to the arrangements at once. I'll have a clergyman up to say a few appropriate words.

MRS. STANDISH. You're so thoughtful, dear!

STANDISH. And then there'll be the monument. We must decide about that. Nothing ornate—a plain granite shaft would be best, I think. What do you say?

MRS. STANDISH. Yes, I think that would be best.

STANDISH. I [illegible] your good taste. And the inscription, of course, [illegible] simple sentiment like: "We mourn our loss," or "She is gathered to her fathers."

MRS. STANDISH. Do you think I ought to go into mourning?

STANDISH. That's hardly necessary. Real grief doesn't deal with externals, you know.

MRS. STANDISH. And after all, this purple *is* a sort of half-mourning, isn't it?

STANDISH. Of course. And now shall we be getting up-town?

MRS. STANDISH. I don't know what I should have done without you, dear—you're so kind.

STANDISH. I couldn't do less. By the way, Cora, they're giving *Elektra* to-night——

MRS. STANDISH. Yes?

STANDISH. I'll get tickets.

MRS. STANDISH. But—but——

STANDISH. What?

MRS. STANDISH. Do you think it would be right to indulge in pleasure so soon after?

STANDISH. Oh, you can't be a recluse. Besides, you could hardly call that pleasure——

MRS. STANDISH. You're awfully good. But you don't care for *Elektra?*

STANDISH. Oh, yes, I do. I'm beginning to understand it. It's really very fine when—when you understand it.

MRS. STANDISH. Yes. Let's get out of this horrid, stuffy place.

STANDISH. Yes. (RUSSELL *enters.*)

RUSSELL. I'm sorry, Mr. Standish, to have kept you—What!

STANDISH. That's all right, Mr. Russell. We won't require your services.

RUSSELL. But—but——

STANDISH. Oh, yes, of course, how stupid of me. (*Giving him a bill.*) Is that satisfactory?

RUSSELL. Quite—but—I——

STANDISH. Good-day.

MRS. STANDISH. Good-day, Mr. Russell.

RUSSELL. Good-bye.

MRS. STANDISH (*as they go out*). I saw the loveliest little Pomeranians in a shop yesterday——

STANDISH. We'll look in on them on our way up-town.

MRS. STANDISH. Oh, Bobbie, you're a darling!

CURTAIN

THE DICKEY BIRD

BY

HARVEY O'HIGGINS AND HARRIET FORD

HARVEY O'HIGGINS AND HARRIET FORD

Harvey O'Higgins was born in London, Canada. He received his education at the University of Toronto. He began his career as a writer of fiction with *The Smoke-Eaters, Old Clinkers,* and *Don-a-Dreams.* He collaborated in the writing of *The Beast, Under the Prophet in Utah,* and *Secret Springs.* In 1913 he went to France and collaborated with the Infanta Eulalia of Spain in writing her *Recollections of Court Life.* Three collections of his short stories have been published, *The Adventures of Detective Barney, Silent Sam,* and *From the Life.* In 1925 his novel *Julie Cane* was one of the most popular books of the year.

Harriet Ford comes from Connecticut and was educated in New Haven and Boston. She took the course at The American Academy of Dramatic Arts and studied with David Belasco. Miss Ford's success in the theater came early in her career. Her first play *The Greatest Thing in the World* (written with Beatrice de Mille) was at once accepted by George C. Tyler as a starring vehicle for Sarah Cowell Le Moyne. Then followed, in 1902, her first great success, *A Gentleman of France,* with Kyrle Bellew and Eleanor Robson in the leading rôles. In 1904 she dramatized *Audrey* for Miss Robson. Later she collaborated in the writing of *The Fourth Estate,* and recently the successful mystery play, *In the Next Room.*

Mr. O'Higgins and Miss Ford have written together a dozen plays. Their first notable work, *The Argyle Case,* was produced in New York in 1913. Then followed many successes: *The Dummy; Polygamy; The Dickey Bird; Mr. Lazarus; On the Hiring Line,* and their dramatization of *Main Street.*

Published plays (collaborations of Mr. O'Higgins and Miss Ford); *On the Hiring Line; The Dummy; The Dickey Bird.* By Miss Harriet Ford and Eleanor Robson: *In the Next Room.*

CHARACTERS

MRS. GRIFFITHS, *in the thirties*
RICHARD P. BOWEN, *about forty*
EMILY, *his wife, aged twenty*
HEDWIG, *Mrs. Griffith's maid*

SCENE: *The living-room of Mrs. Griffith's apartment, New York.*

TIME: *The present.*

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THE DICKEY BIRD

The living-room of a New York apartment, Central Park West. French windows at back overlook the Park. Shades and attractive chintz curtains, and a window-seat with chintz-covered cushions. There is a door up Right; another, Left, leads to the hall. Fireplace Right below door. A sofa or wide seat stands facing front at right angles to the fireplace. Small table just below it to the Right. A large table stands Right Center with books and magazines. Chair back of table and a large chair Left of it. It is evident that the occupant is a woman of modern artistic bent.

MRS. GRIFFITHS *is seated at the fireplace, a small table in front of her, smoking a large after-dinner cigarette, her eye puckered up, playing solitaire.* HEDWIG *is on her knees to Left of her, brushing up the cigarette ashes.*

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*after hesitating to herself a moment—throwing down a card*). Oh—the devil's in these cards! Now where's that queen? Where is that queen? (*Shaking ashes from cigarette.* HEDWIG *brushes them up.*) She's buried! (*Shaking ashes back of sofa.* HEDWIG *rises and going up, brushes floor there—then kneels down Right of* MRS. GRIFFITHS *and takes up ash tray.*) I'd 've had it, if I'd got that queen! Hedwig, you keep this place so clean it's like living in a hospital! I'm here for my comfort, not for my health! (*Playing the cards.*)

HEDWIG (*moves up Left as if to go*). Ya, Mrs. Bowen.

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*picking up a pack of cards, re-shuffling*). I'm expecting a woman here this afternoon to look at the apartment.

HEDWIG (*crossing*). Ya, Mrs. Bowen.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Hedwig, I told you to stop calling me Mrs. Bowen. I paid a thousand dollars to get rid of that name. If you continue to do it, I shall call you Bijou or something else French.

HEDWIG (*in consternation*). Oh, no, Mrs.—Mrs. Griffits.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. You haven't anything against the name of Griffiths, have you?

HEDWIG. But I cannot say it—(*trying*)—Griffitz—ndz—dat is why I say Bowen.

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*shuffling the cards*). Well, I'll change my name for a husband, but I won't for a servant. I've got a divorce from the name of Bowen.

HEDWIG. Den vhy are you not Miss Griffin-fitz?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Because I'm not an old maid, and I won't go into your class to oblige you.

HEDWIG (*turning to go*). Oh, Mrs. Bow—Bowen——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. There you go again! Hedwig, come back here. I wanted you particularly not to call me Mrs. Bowen this afternoon, because the woman who is coming here to look at the apartment signed herself Emily Bowen and I have written her as Mrs. Griffiths. I don't want to be explaining to a strange woman why you're calling me by one name and I am signing myself another. (*The bell is heard. She rises and goes quickly to door.*) If that is Mrs. Bowen, show her in and come and tell me.

HEDWIG (*crossing up to fireplace*). Ya, Mrs. Griffizz.

(MRS. GRIFFITHS *goes out Right.* HEDWIG *picks up the cards, hurriedly thrusts them into her pocket, puts cigarettes on mantel, and goes out Left. She leaves the door open. After an instant voices are heard.*)

BOWEN (*outside*). Mrs. Griffiths?

HEDWIG. Ya, will you please come in? I vill tell her.

(*Enter* BOWEN *and* MRS. BOWEN.)

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, Richard, this is charming! This is *it!*

BOWEN (*looking about*). Yes—very pretty—very pretty——

MRS. BOWEN (*at fireplace*). And, oh, dear—so different from

those apartments we've been seeing. Why, this is almost like a home. I'm sure we could be happy here. (*Sitting on sofa.*)

BOWEN (*back of her, his arm about her*). Anywhere, my dear —anywhere that you are.

MRS. BOWEN (*pouting*). Except Canada, I suppose——

BOWEN (*moving to front of sofa*). Well, now, Emily, when a man has been living all his life in a big city, he can't stand that provincial attitude. I could be happy with you anywhere, but we could be happier here. (*Sits beside her, his arm about her.*)

MRS. BOWEN (*rapturously*). Oh, aren't you the sweet! (*Kisses him.*)

BOWEN. Nobody could be anything but sweet to my little honey-bunch. (*Kisses her.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Well, now, Richard, if I give up going back to Canada for you, you'll give up wearing that stiff ugly old hat for me, won't you? (*Hitting it with her parasol.*)

BOWEN. A man doesn't like a woman dictating to him about his clothes.

MRS. BOWEN. I'm not dictating. Oh, Richard, you're so strong-minded.

BOWEN. Well, Emily, there has to be a head to the house— if we're going to be happy.

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, I'm sure we'll be happy and this will be our real honeymoon. Just you and I together always. Everybody else outside!

BOWEN (*kissing her again*). Everybody—everybody! (*He turns, sniffing, then rises.*) She evidently smokes cigarettes. Filthy habit!

MRS. BOWEN (*running to window*). Oh, we'll soon get rid of that. Everybody smokes nowadays. (*Opening the windows.*) And this will be our park! Look at that couple on the bench. He's got his arm around her. Isn't it dear? (*Putting her arm around him. His is about her.*) Don't you wish they'd stay there forever, so that we could always

look out and see them? I'd like to have them there and feed them like the birds! (*They kiss again.*)

BOWEN (*as they move down, arms still about each other*). My little bird—is she going to be happy in her little nest?

MRS. BOWEN. Two little birds—me and my Dickey Bird.

BOWEN (*drawing away. Abruptly*). No! Don't call me that!

MRS. BOWEN (*taken aback*). Oh——

BOWEN. It has unpleasant associations. My—my mother used to call me that. (*Crossing and standing in front of the table.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Unpleasant?

BOWEN (*against table*). Sad—sad associations.

MRS. BOWEN (*going to him*). Oh—the sweet! Did it hurt him (*kissing him*)—let me kiss him hurt. There now. (*Kissing him, cooing over him.*)

BOWEN. Well, I suppose they'll want two hundred and fifty for this—art atmosphere. (*Moving away from her.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Is that too much?

BOWEN. Not if you want it, my dear.

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, I do, and I want this room for you—to read your paper and drink your coffee in front of the fire. (*Going to fireplace.*)

BOWEN (*moving back Left of table*). It would do with a few comfortable chairs. (*He is suddenly arrested by the chair Left of table, and goes toward it suspiciously.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, we can easily get them. We'll get everything just to suit you.

BOWEN. Funny how alike—two chairs can be——

MRS. BOWEN (*looking around the room for another chair*). Two chairs—where?

BOWEN. You'd almost swear it was the same chair!

MRS. BOWEN (*coming to table*). The same as what?

BOWEN (*affects*). A chair I used to have. (*Then springing up.*) I remember it because it was so damned uncomfortable.

MRS. BOWEN (*leaving the chair*). We'll put it in the kitchen

I'm jealous of it if it's like a chair you knew before me, and I won't have you remembering anything uncomfortable. (*She moves Left and leaves her parasol up in Left corner of the room.*)

BOWEN (*he looks at the other furniture and then at the pictures on the walls, gets up Right, then he exclaims suddenly*). What's this woman's name?

MRS. BOWEN (*turning back*). Why—Mrs. Griffiths——

BOWEN. Griffiths?!

(MRS. GRIFFITHS *appears at the door.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Why—what's the matter?

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*coming into the room*). Mrs. Bowen? (*At the sound of her voice* BOWEN *turns Right desperately, as if to escape.*) I'm Mrs. Griffiths—(*she crosses*)—Is this Mr.——? (*He turns facing her and she breaks off with a changed manner.*) Why—oh—yes, of course—— (*Staring at him.*)

BOWEN (*blankly*). Yes—yes—of course.

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, you know each other?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Yes, your husband probably doesn't remember me by that name. That was before I was Mrs. Griffiths.

BOWEN. Yes—yes—it was before——

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*moving to him, holding out her hand*). Well, this is a surprise! How do you do! (*He takes it reluctantly, and is very uncomfortable.*) Emily Bowen—your wife's signature—I didn't suspect it was Mrs. *Richard* Bowen—I didn't know you were married.

BOWEN (*hastily*). No—no—it was a very quiet affair.

MRS. BOWEN. Quiet. Why, Richard——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. I hardly recognized him. You know he used to be clean-shaven.

MRS. BOWEN (*jealously*). Why! I didn't know you'd ever been clean-shaven.

BOWEN (*nettled*). Well, I wasn't exactly born with this.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Now, my dear, you mustn't be jealous of

every woman that knew your husband before he grew a mustache. It'll flatter him too much.

MRS. BOWEN. I wasn't thinking of being jealous.

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*going back of her*). Oh, no—of course not. That was just joking. You wanted to see the apartment (*Rings for* HEDWIG.)

MRS. BOWEN. Yes—we——

BOWEN. Yes—though, of course, I was afraid that the rent of an apartment like this might be much too large for us.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, I think we'll have no difficulty in agreeing on terms.

(*Enter* HEDWIG. MRS. BOWEN *goes to* BOWEN *and links her arm in his.*)

Show Mrs. Bowen the rooms. I didn't know there was a husband coming, and my room——

HEDWIG. Your room is all right——

(MRS. GRIFFITHS *cuts her off with a look and gesture.*)

MRS. GRIFFITHS. I'd rather you'd see it alone.

MRS. BOWEN. But I couldn't very well decide on them without Richard. (*Leading him to Left.*)

BOWEN (*hastily drawing back*). I'd rather—I'd rather you'd decide on them, if you don't mind, dear. I'll stay and talk over terms.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. After all, you know, you mustn't spoil him. There'll be plenty of things you'll have to leave to him to decide.

MRS. BOWEN (*crossing toward the door*). But Richard and I——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. A man makes trouble enough in your house without being encouraged. You're not beginning right.

MRS. BOWEN (*following* HEDWIG *out, protesting*). Well, I really don't like to decide——

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*at door*). No—but you can report. (*Closing the door, she turns and looks at the thoroughly uncomfortable* BOWEN.) Well, Dickey Bird!

BOWEN. Don't call me that!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. This is what you've been doing. This is why I never heard what had become of you!

BOWEN. You're not going to tell her!

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*laughing*). Oh, no, I don't have to make any confessions—that's for you.

BOWEN. I can't tell her—I can't do it!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. What's the matter? Are you ashamed of me?

BOWEN. She's an Episcopalian from Canada. They don't believe in divorce. I never told her I was married before. A young girl like that—she'd never understand how I could do it.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Well, if you ask me, I didn't understand it myself. Now that I see her—oh, well, of course—pretty and young—if you like them thin. I don't suppose she's got an idea in her head, but then you've got so many.

BOWEN. I didn't leave you for her. I didn't know her at all. I never met her until after I ——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Go ahead—say it. Until after you had walked out of that theater and left me—left me flat, without a word of warning, without even calling a cab!

BOWEN. Well, I can't explain it. I'm sorry about it, but I did it, and that's all there is to it.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, no, that isn't all there is to it! You kill your wife and that's all there is to it for the corpse, but murder will out. You'll keep coming back to the scene of your crime like the villain in the melodrama. It turns up the first time you go out to rent a flat. The very furniture comes around to haunt you.

BOWEN. If it's going to haunt me, it'll have to buy a railroad ticket!

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*unheeding*). Until finally the only thing you can do is to make a clean breast of it to lay the ghost.

BOWEN. Well, I'm going to get out of here!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. No, you're not! You're going to rent this flat and live here with these mementoes of your villainy, or I'll tell her who you are and who I am!

BOWEN. You devil!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. And you'll pay me enough rent to keep me comfortable in Palm Beach for the winter. You owe me alimony.

BOWEN. You've trapped me into this!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. No, I didn't. The door was open and the little Dickey Bird flew into his cage.

(*Enter* MRS. BOWEN, *gushing in excited delight.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, Richard, it's perfectly darling! The most charming place—just what we want—that is, if the rent——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, yes—your husband agreed to my terms. I don't think he likes the furniture.

MRS. BOWEN (*laughing*). I'll get him one easy chair—the kind he likes.

BOWEN (*desperately*). We must go, my dear——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, no, you must stop for tea. (*Taking his hat and cane from him.*) There are lots of things to talk over and I have a lease for you to sign. I'll get it. (*She goes out.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, Richard, such a duck of a bedroom! The darlingest old four-poster.

BOWEN. Four-poster!

MRS. BOWEN. I'm sure it's been in her family for generations.

BOWEN. I'll not sleep in a four-poster—I hate 'em! I'll not live in this damn place!

MRS. BOWEN (*horrified*). Why, Richard!

BOWEN. She wants too much for it anyway.

MRS. BOWEN. Why, you agreed——

BOWEN. I didn't. All I want is to get out of here as quick as we can.

MRS. BOWEN. Why, Richard, I don't understand you.

BOWEN. It isn't necessary for you to understand.

MRS. BOWEN (*her lips beginning to quiver*). Well, I think you might consider me a little. I think it's lovely. I'd quite set my heart on it. We were going to be so happy here.

You said it was just what you wanted and you didn't care how much it cost if I wanted it——

BOWEN. Now I'll not have you make a scene—behaving like a fool!

MRS. BOWEN. Oh—oh—you never spoke like that to me before.

BOWEN (*in a blind fury, pacing up and down*). We'll get out of here the best way we can, and write this woman a letter and tell her we don't want her flat!

MRS. BOWEN. There's something going on here that you're not telling me, and I mean to find out what it is—I'll stay here till I do.

BOWEN (*going to her and putting his arm forcibly about her*). You'll come out of here this minute!

(*Enter* MRS. GRIFFITHS, *the lease and* BOWEN'S *hat and cane in her hand.*)

MRS. BOWEN. No, Richard, I'll not go—I've no intention of going—I tell you I won't go!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Don't mind me—I was a bride once myself. (*Putting hat and cane on chair, then going back to sofa.*)

MRS. BOWEN (*crossing*). Mrs. Griffiths, why doesn't my husband want to take this apartment? (*Moving up to back of table.* BOWEN *quickly gets his hat and cane.*)

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Why! *doesn't* he want to take it? I understood he did.

BOWEN. I don't intend to be rushed into a decision. I want time to think it over.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, don't worry about that, the more you think about it, the more sure you'll be to take it.

(MRS. BOWEN *sits back of table. Enter* HEDWIG *with tea-tray.* MRS. GRIFFITHS *sits on sofa at fireplace.*)

Put it here, Hedwig. (*Indicating small table beside her.* HEDWIG *goes and places tray on table, then stands by it waiting to serve.* BOWEN *sits reluctantly Left of table. She turns to* MRS. BOWEN.) With a husband you always have to make up his mind for him. They never know what they want unless it's something that they shouldn't have.

They're always set on having anything that isn't good for them. Cream or lemon, and how many?

MRS. BOWEN. One and lemon, please.

(HEDWIG *gives* MRS. BOWEN *her tea, then takes hat and cane from* BOWEN *and puts them back on chair at door and returns to the table.*)

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*looking* BOWEN *over*). And they have the most extraordinary ideas about clothes. You have to watch them every minute. They get themselves up in the most ridiculous neckties and waistcoats. (BOWEN *becomes conscious of his.*) They'll wear anything, no matter how ugly or how uncomfortable, if it's the fashion.

MRS. BOWEN. Why, I thought that's what they always said of women.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Mr. Bowen takes his clear, I remember.

MRS. BOWEN. Why, Richard—oh, no——

BOWEN (*defiantly*). Three lumps, please.

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*giving him the sugar*). Not if you were my husband! You ought to watch that sugar. (*To* MRS. BOWEN.) That's why he's such a bad color.

MRS. BOWEN (*getting up and looking at him anxiously*). Why, don't you think he looks well?

BOWEN. Of course, my dear. Never better in my life.

(HEDWIG *gives him his tea, then goes out and returns at once with rack laden with cake, etc., going to* MRS. BOWEN *and* BOWEN, *who refuse it.*)

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*pouring her own tea*). They're always that way, and they're always that way about their health. Perfect children, and the moment they get a tummy-ache, they're sure they're going to die.

BOWEN (*politely*). You seem to have had considerable experience with men.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, you remind me so of my husband. That's just the sort of thing he would say. You know the most amazing thing about them is their secretiveness. You think you know every idea in their little heads and suddenly you discover they've been leading a whole life of their own

that you never knew anything about. I suppose that nature has given it to them for their protection.

MRS. BOWEN (*wide-eyed*). Their protection?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. For their protection. If women really knew what men were thinking about, they'd be so unbearable to us that the race would come to an end.

MRS. BOWEN (*looking at* BOWEN *doubtfully*). Well, I'm sure that Richard isn't like——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. You're quite right to let him think you think so—that's the way I always did.

BOWEN. Your husband, Madam, must have had a very happy life.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Well, he certainly pretended that he did. But there's the problem—if you try to shelter them from temptation you weaken their moral fiber, and they lose control of themselves at the sight of the first pretty woman that smiles at them on the street.

MRS. BOWEN (*with conviction*). I think that the women——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. I know exactly what you're going to say, and I quite agree with you. The only thing for us women to do is to get together and reorganize the social system for the protection of men. We over-work them, exploit domesticity, and enslave them through their weaknesses and their vanities. We women have got to save them, if we're going to save ourselves.

BOWEN (*on nettles*). This seems a long way from the point. If we're going to rent an apartment from a perfect stranger ——(*Rises.*)

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Oh, if you want references, I can refer you to my ex-husband. (BOWEN *drops back to his chair.*)

MRS. BOWEN (*in shocked surprise*). Why, have you been divorced?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Deserted——

MRS. BOWEN. Oh! why—what for?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. That's something I have yet to learn. My husband and I went out to the theater one night together—we enjoyed the play together. When it was over, he started

out a little in advance of me to get us a taxi, and he never came back.

MRS. BOWEN. Never came back!

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*brokenly*). I was up all night half frantic, telephoning to the hospitals and the police, and in the morning, in walks a messenger boy with a note from him, on a telegraph blank, saying it was all over, and he was never coming back. I haven't seen him from that day—to this!

MRS. BOWEN (*sympathetically*). Was he drinking?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Drinking! Well, to tell you the truth, I thought I knew that man inside and out. But since that happened I've decided that I knew no more about him than you know about a Chinese servant. He may have been eating opium!

MRS. BOWEN. How awful!

BOWEN. Absurd, my dear; perfectly absurd!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. He had a queer way of looking at me sometimes when he thought I wasn't noticing him.

(*Enter* HEDWIG.)

MRS. BOWEN. Perhaps he wasn't happy.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Happy? Why, he was always so cheerful that I used to call him my Dickey Bird.

MRS. BOWEN (*rising*). Dickey Bird!

HEDWIG. Shall I take de tray, Mrs. Bowen?

MRS. BOWEN (*to* MRS. GRIFFITHS). Mrs. Bowen!

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*to* HEDWIG). If you continue to call me by the name of your previous employer——

MRS. BOWEN. Richard!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Hedwig, you're discharged!

HEDWIG (*bursting into tears*). Oh, Mrs. Bowen—Mrs. Griffidtz——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Leave the room!

HEDWIG (*[illegible]*). But I cannot say dat name—Griffidtz—Mrs. Bowen—— (*She goes out indignantly.*)

MRS. BOWEN. Richard! [illegible] woman—? (*Turning to* MRS. GRIFFITHS.) Are you? (*To* BOWEN.) You deserted?

What *is* it? Were *you*—were you her Dickey Bird? (*Groans.* BOWEN *is furious, his head in his hands.*) You were—you were! (*To* MRS. GRIFFITHS.) Who are you?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. This is not my day in court. Ask him.

MRS. BOWEN. Richard! How could you?—All the time—pretending—lying to me—you *have* lied to me—over and over—every time you've kissed me it's been a lie! Our honeymoon—it wasn't *yours!* You had *yours* with her!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. My dear child, you're lucky. The man at least was married to me. And the divorce papers were perfectly regular—I can swear to that. He's yours! Nobody wants him—now don't cry—he isn't worth it.

MRS. BOWEN. He isn't mine—I don't want him—I want him to go away——

(BOWEN *springs up.*)

I don't want to ever see him again—I want my mother! (MRS. GRIFFITHS *leads her, weeping on her shoulder, to sofa, and they sit.*)

BOWEN. I'm going away—but before I go, you've got to understand. And you, too. (*To* MRS. GRIFFITHS.) Do you remember the name of the play we went to see that night?

MRS. GRIFFITHS. The name of the play?

BOWEN. It was Ibsen's *Doll's House.*

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*seated Right of* MRS. BOWEN). Well, will somebody tell me what that's got to do with it?

BOWEN. When I saw that play I realized what I was. I was a male Nora. Married to a woman who never believed I was capable of having an opinion, an action, a mind of my own—just the way that man was with his wife!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Why, I never heard anything so absurd in my life!

BOWEN. Yes—absurd, that's what I thought until I began to apply the lesson to myself. She was his twittering lark, and I was your Dickey Bird. He treated her—he laughed at her just the way you laughed at me. When she revolted, I revolted, and when she went out into the night I went out after her!

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Well, if that isn't the craziest——

BOWEN (*going back of table*). Do you remember that very afternoon you insisted on going to my tailor with me and dictating the color and the style and the cut of my clothes? And that damn shopkeeper grinning behind my back—I saw him in the mirror! And then you made me buy that cursed Alpine hat thing, that I wouldn't be seen wearing now if the policeman arrested me every time he caught me on the street without it! (*Moving back.*) Making fun of my opinions! I even had to lie about the way I voted—secret ballot, thank God! I didn't want to go to that play that night. I had tickets for a musical comedy, but I was glad I went. I was being treated like a child—a victim of your maternal instinct.

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*indignantly*). I never had a maternal instinct in my life!

BOWEN. Yes, you did! You all have it. If you haven't children, you waste it on your dogs. If you haven't dogs, you make your husbands miserable with it.

MRS. BOWEN. Oh, Richard—you could have told me!

BOWEN. I couldn't—I couldn't tell the truth even to myself. I'd been lying so long—living a lie. Lying about my bank account because she wouldn't trust me with my own money—lying when I sneaked off to church on Sunday morning——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. To church!

BOWEN. Because she had a religion there wasn't any church for. Lying when I sneaked off to a ball game——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Ball game!

BOWEN. I made up my mind when that curtain fell that I was finished with it. I didn't know what to do—I didn't know where to go. I sat up all night in the waiting-room of the Union Station. In the morning I bought a ticket for Canada. I knew you couldn't get me back from there—even if you put the police after me.

MRS. BOWEN (*moving to back of table*). Oh, Richard!

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*eating a tea-cake*). Well, I swear—you're pathetic!

BOWEN (*to* MRS. BOWEN). I never intended to marry again, but when I met you and you believed in me and looked up to to me and treated me like a person with some intelligence——

MRS. GRIFFITHS. And appealed to your paternal instinct——

BOWEN. I saw by some Chicago papers that she'd got a divorce, and I thought that was all there'd be to it. I meant to tell you and I kept putting it off. I never expected to hear of her again. I thought she'd stay in Chicago where she belonged, and I wasn't going within a thousand miles of Chicago—I can tell you that! There's the truth now. You can do what you like. I'm going back to the hotel.

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*rising*). No, you don't! You're not going to desert this woman and leave her on my hands.

MRS. BOWEN. He's not deserting me! And I'm not going to leave him. (*Going to him.*)

BOWEN. Emily!

MRS. BOWEN (*patting his face, speaking as if to a child*). I don't blame you—I don't like her any better than you did. I think you were perfectly right to leave her. She just got us here to make this trouble for us. I hate her and I wouldn't live in her flat if she gave it to us! You come along with me. (*Gets his hat and puts it on his head, then gets his cane and puts it in his hand.*)

BOWEN. Yes, my dear.

MRS. BOWEN. I think you've been treated shamefully. We'll get you a new hat, and you'll come right back to Canada. (*Her arm in his.*)

BOWEN (*meekly*). Yes, my dear.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Do they have any divorce in Canada?

MRS. BOWEN (*arm in arm they turn toward her*). No, they don't. You can't get a divorce in Canada without going before the Senate.

MRS. GRIFFITHS. Well, then it looks to me as if you were safe. He can't escape *you* in Canada, and if he comes back here, *I'll* get him.

MRS. BOWEN (*urging him to the door*). Come along, Richard. Don't you mind her. (*He starts to speak but she puts her hand over his mouth.*) Don't you answer her.

BOWEN. No, my dear. (*He goes out.*)

MRS. BOWEN. You run right along. (*She goes to corner of the room for her parasol, then turns.*) You cat! (*She goes out.*)

MRS. GRIFFITHS (*calling after them*). You clip his wings when you get him up there, or some other cat'll get him!

CURTAIN

MEET THE MISSUS!

BY

KENYON NICHOLSON

KENYON NICHOLSON

Kenyon Nicholson, born at Crawfordsville, Indiana, 1894, was graduated from Wabash College, and studied in the post-graduate schools at Columbia and Cambridge (England). He was for three years associated with the Stuart Walker Company. He has during the past four years been an instructor at Columbia offering special play writing classes as assistant to Hatcher Hughes.

His first play, written in collaboration with Meredith Nicholson, was *Honor Bright.* He is also the author of several published one-act plays.

Published plays: *Honor Bright* (with Meredith Nicholson); *Garden Varieties;* one-act plays: *Meet the Missus; The Bug Man; Bedside Manners; A Hint to Brides.*

CHARACTERS

RUBY LA MOTTE
BERT, *her husband*
DOLLY DOYLE, *the other woman*

SCENE: *A room in a New York hotel.*

TIME: *The present.*

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MEET THE MISSUS!

[NOTE: *Hotel Hildona, "the Home of Theatrical Folk," caters to vaudeville artists who desire to keep within running distance of the booking-offices along Broadway. It has a large without bath—as you wish. In the basement dining-room, where nightly a 75-cent six-course table d'hote dinner is served, it is not unusual to see a lion-tamer sit down to a lamb stew, and an acrobat toying with a plate of corned beef and cabbage, and a song-and-dance team divide a porterhouse—all at the same table. Here one may garner the latest gossip of the Rialto.*]

SCENE: *Room 345, Hotel Hildona, West 47th Street, New York City. It is the bed-room of* BERT LA MOTTE *and wife, of "La Motte and La Motte, That Natty Pair." One senses a parlor and bath in the offing. It is a typical third-class hotel bedroom; brass twin beds, a bureau, two chairs, lace curtains and a musty, red carpet. In the middle of the room is a table upon which rest side by side a Gideon Bible and a copy of "Variety." The room is strewn with clothes, which seem to have flowed from a wardrobe trunk standing in one corner.*

TIME: Three A.M.

At rise: RUBY LA MOTTE *is discovered, tucked up in bed, sound asleep. The other bed is unoccupied. A night-light wearing a dirty pink shade is the only illumination. . . . Pretty soon there is the sound of a key being fitted into the outside door. Enter* BERT LA MOTTE. *He is not intoxicated to the extent that he staggers, but he has reached the stage*

technically known as being "lit up." BERT *looks toward the bed, then whispers to someone in the doorway behind him.*

BERT. S'all right! She's dead to the world. Come on!

(*There enters* DOLLY DOYLE, *a blond creature who, from her paradise tips to her short-cramped pumps, is every inch an actress. She is not too old, and pretty in a rather obvious way.*)

DOLLY. Bert, this is fierce—this time o' night and all!

BERT. You ain't gettin' cold feet?

DOLLY. No, only——

BERT (*alcoholically confidential*). Now, listen to me, kid, we're doin' this on my say-so, and all I ask from you is just to keep mum. I'll do the talkin' for the both of us.

DOLLY. It's all wrong—you wouldn't be doin' this if you wasn't stewed.

BERT. Oh, wouldn't I? I s'pose you think livin' with Ruby's a panic. We're friendly like cat and dog!

(*Reassured,* DOLLY *crosses the room on tiptoe and looks at the sleeping* RUBY.)

DOLLY (*appraisingly*). She ain't so hard to look at. . . . From what you said I thought she was a scarecrow.

BERT. Ruby'd never get no blue ribbon at a beauty show, but she's got her good points.

DOLLY. She's about my height, wouldn't you say?

BERT. About. . . .

DOLLY. Seems to me I've run acrost her on the same bill some place. She ever played Interstate time out of Chicago?

BERT. Has she! There ain't no time this side o' Frisco Ruby ain't played! She comes from a family o' troupers. Before she married me she was doin' a sister act with her aunt. They were billed as the Sisters Maynard.

DOLLY. She looks sorta familiar all right. But then after a few years in the show business everybody you meet looks familiar. . . .

(RUBY *stirs uneasily in her sleep.*)

BERT (*sotto voce*). Shall I wake her up now? I wanta get this over with. . . .

DOLLY (*restraining him*). Leave her lay quiet a while. I ain't so sure this is just the way to break the news.

BERT. Sure it's the way! Open and above-board. Ain't that what we decided sittin' over there in Pete's place?

DOLLY. Well, it don't seem right somehow.

BERT. Now listen, Dolly, no use gettin' up in the air. It's plain as the nose on your face. You and me have fell for each other hard, and as it happens I'm married, there's only one thing to do—to tell Ruby.

DOLLY. You can tell her all right, but what'll *she* do?

BERT. Naturally, at first she'll prob'ly raise hell, but after she cools down she'll see it our way. I know Ruby like a book.

DOLLY. Maybe it's just because I ain't used to it yet. Remember, Bert, I never laid eyes on you before to-night.

BERT (*fondly*). But you admit you fell for me, doncha?

DOLLY. If I wasn't afraida makin' you stuck up I'd say so.

BERT. There's one thing I never told you yet. When Ruby and me was married we agreed if either the one or the other of us saw anyone we liked better we could break away—quit flat, without no fireworks, no regrets. That makes it sound better to you, don't it?

DOLLY. I think so. (*Suspiciously.*) This is really the first time since you been married you ever felt this way about anyone?

BERT. Absolutely! When you walked into Pete's to-night I felt I'd knowed you for years. You suited me from the ground up. And I'd just dropped in for a plate o' ham and eggs before goin' to bed. Why you s'pose I got the waiter to give me a knockdown to you if I wasn't so gone on you?

DOLLY. I admit it got me all fussed up—before the others and all.

BERT. When I found out you was a artist, too, that's all I needed! I went clear off my nut.

DOLLY. I'll say!

BERT. Wait till you see the act I'm goin' to frame for us! I tell you, kid, we're made for each other. We can't fight against it—it's bigger'n we are.

DOLLY (*modestly*). I don't wanta fight against it—if your wife'll give you up.

BERT (*beaming*). You'll never be sorry you said that. That's all I wanta know. (*Coming closer.*) Give us a kiss—for good luck!

DOLLY (*pushing him away virtuously*). Not till we've got the right! Nobody can say I ever come between husband and wife. Go on, wake her up. Let's get it over with.

BERT. Better not let her see you till she gets her bearings. She'll have enough of a shock as it is.

DOLLY. I'll say!

(DOLLY *moves to the other side of the room, where she stands in the shadow.* BERT *leans over the sleeping form of his wife.*)

BERT (*to* DOLLY). All ready?

DOLLY. Any time you are.

(BERT *plucks gingerly at the counterpane.*)

BERT. Ruby! Wake up and listen a minute. . . . Ruby!

(RUBY *stirs, but makes no further response.*)

DOLLY (*interested*). She's some hard sleeper!

BERT (*shaking* RUBY *gently*). Ruby! Shake it off!

(RUBY *opens her eyes and looks up coldly at her husband.*)

RUBY. Say, what's eatin' on you!

BERT. Listen, Ruby, I got something to tell you.

RUBY (*turning over again*). Don't wanta hear it. . . . I need my sleep!

BERT (*to* DOLLY). You see! That's the kind o' wife I got!

(BERT *shakes* RUBY *again.*)

BERT. You gotta wake up, Ruby, and you might as well make up your mind to it.

RUBY. Save it till morning.

BERT. What I gotta tell you won't keep till morning.

RUBY (*crossly*). Well, what is it?

(*Now that the crucial moment has arrived,* BERT *hardly knows where to begin.*)

BERT. Turn around so's you can get me straight. Here's your kimono—slip it on.

RUBY. Say, who do you think you are! Not satisfied with battin' round till all hours of the night yourself, you gotta wake me up, too! Why can't you get in bed like a human being without disturbin' everybody in the hotel?

BERT (*solemnly*). There's a good reason why I woke you up, Ruby.

RUBY. Go on and spring it!

BERT (*hesitantly*). Ruby, you remember what we promised each other the day we got married?

RUBY (*hotly*). You wake me up in the dead o' night to ask me that!

BERT. You remember? We said if either one of us ever met up with someone we like better we'd be on the level and tell the other one right away.

(RUBY *is wide awake now.*)

RUBY. Say, what is this——!

BERT (*floridly*). I come to tell you, Ruby, I've met that someone to-night—a little girl, who, sorry as I am to tell you, means everything in the world to me.

RUBY (*dropping back on the pillows*). Aw, go to bed—you're drunk!

BERT (*hurt*). I'm not—I'm cold sober! And I'm in dead earnest. You ain't backin' out on our bargain, are you?

RUBY. Don't make me laugh! If anyone's fool enough to want you, I say take you and welcome! When they get to know you like I do they'll give you the air quick enough!

BERT. That's what *you* say! Well, no one can say I wasn't on the level with you. I've come clean with the whole story—no cheatin' behind your back like many a man woulda done.

RUBY. You wanta leave to-night?

BERT. There ain't no particular hurry now we understand

each other. But if you say so, we'll go over to Jersey tomorrow and file the divorce papers.

RUBY. You work fast, don't you! He comes in, tells me he's met a girl and now he wants a divorce! You're about as funny as a cry for help! Have you thought about our thirty weeks Fox time we just signed for?

BERT. Sure. I'll get you another pardner.

RUBY. That's good glue, but it don't stick!

BERT. And I'll give you all rights to our old routine.

RUBY. That's nice of you—since it's mine already.

BERT. Oh, is that so!

RUBY. The best of it's mine and you know it, Bert La Motte! Waltheim told me he gave us our booking on the strength of that comedy radio-phone dance number I framed. And who thought out the rapid-fire patter we use for a finish? We'd be chasers on a bill yet if it wasn't for me!

BERT. Is *that* so!

RUBY. Sure you'll give me the old routine! And what's more you'll starve to death if you have to go out as a single.

BERT. I'm not gonna do a single. Miss Doyle and I——

RUBY. So that's her name—Doyle, is it?

BERT. Miss Doyle and I're gonna head a flash act. We got a swell production doped out. We'll be playin' the Palace before the season's out.

RUBY (*with nice sarcasm*). What're you goin' to use for money?

BERT. Now, you needn't get nasty—just because I'm tryin' to do the right thing by you.

RUBY. Where'd you pick up this tramp? Headlining in Perth Amboy this week, I suppose?

(DOLLY *emerges from her seclusion, her feathers up.*)

DOLLY (*to* RUBY). Who're you callin' a tramp! You better be careful how you run a person down!

BERT. *Nix, Dolly!* I'll fix it up. . . .

RUBY (*astounded*). Who—who is—*this* . . . !

DOLLY. I'll let you know who I am if you call me a tramp again!

BERT (*trying to do the right thing*). Ruby, this is Miss Doyle. . . . Dolly, meet the missus!

(*There is an electric silence.*)

RUBY. You mean to say you brought her up here right under my nose!

BERT. How else could I show you I was on the level with you . . . open and above-board?

RUBY (*witheringly*). Well, for pure unadulterated nerve, you get the plaid earrings!

DOLLY (*to* BERT). I thought you said your wife would understand!

RUBY. He told you that, did he? Well, I do understand. I understand that I married the dumbest cluck that ever walked on two feet!

BERT. Aw, talk sense, Ruby!

RUBY. Sure, I'll talk sense! You brought your affinity up to meet me did you? Well, I'm glad to meet her. When she gets you she gets a prize package, I'll say! (*To* DOLLY.) Come closer, I want to congratulate you!

(DOLLY *hesitates until* BERT *nudges her.*)

DOLLY (*surprised*). You wanta congratulate me?

RUBY. Give me your hand on it. (DOLLY *cautiously extends her hand.*) I'm glad to shake it. Take him, and all I can say is, God help you!

BERT. What's the use o' bein' that way, Ruby? Can't we all part friends?

DOLLY (*to* BERT). I told you I oughtn'ta come up here!

(RUBY *is still holding* DOLLY'S *hand. She is staring at her intently.* DOLLY *tries to pull her hand away.*)

RUBY. No, let me look at you a minute.

BERT. What's the big idea?

RUBY. Say, where have we met before?

DOLLY (*in the grand manner*). *Have* we met before . . . ?

RUBY. You say your name is Doyle?

BERT. Dolly Doyle.

DOLLY. I ain't ashamed of it.

RUBY. We've met somewhere, that's sure.

DOLLY. That's what I said to your husband when we first come in.

RUBY. Where you been the last few years—what circuit, I mean?

DOLLY. Mostly Eastern time—Poli, Fox, Inter-state . . . some Gus Sun.

RUBY. Couldn't've been on any of them. We've been playin' Loew's since the Flood, seems to me.

DOLLY. Well, I don't know then.

RUBY. Ever do any specialties to speak of?

DOLLY. When I was a kid I done a number in rompers and pig-tails. Frances White stole all her stuff from me.

RUBY. The "Won't You Be My Beau" number?

DOLLY. That's the one! It was written for me specially by Roy Leddy—his first big hit. He's my brother——

RUBY (*excitedly*). I've got you now! Hazel Leddy! Little Hazel Leddy . . . !

DOLLY. That *was* me all right.

RUBY. Then, you don't remember me? . . . Ruby Nellis?

DOLLY. Not Ruby Nellis of "Henderson's School Days"!

RUBY. None other! . . . "Henderson's School Days!"

DOLLY. Ruby!

RUBY. Hazel!

(*Their manner toward each other changes instantly. They warmly embrace.* BERT, *who has been listening uneasily, now edges closer.*)

BERT. Say, what is this—Old Home Week!

(*The two women pay no attention to him. In disgust* BERT *lights a cigarette and waits for more.*)

RUBY. My Lord—how long ago's that been!

DOLLY. Don't ask me. Let's not think about it!

RUBY (*happily reminiscent*). *There* was a schooldays act for you! Gus Edwards ain't gotta thing on old Jake Henderson.

DOLLY. Jake passed in his checks last winter. Hear about it?

RUBY. I noticed it in *Variety*. Out in Tacoma, wasn't it? Bright's Disease. . . .

DOLLY. He was a good old wagon. Remember how he used to sorta daddy all o' us? I'll never forget how he'd make me take a dose o' castor oil when I looked like I needed it.

(*The two women laugh heartily.*)

RUBY. You remember Rose Wiess?

DOLLY. Do I? Didn't we used to fight in every town to see who'd get first shot at the electric iron we bought together?

RUBY. Well, when we played the Kedzie out in Chi last spring she caught our act and come round back to see me. She's married to an insurance agent. Got two kids and says she couldn't be no happier.

DOLLY. I bumped into Chic Howard up in Boston last month. He's managin' a burlesque house up there—rollin' in money. His own Buick and everything.

RUBY. Chic Howard! . . . Who'd ever thought that little bum would have amounted to anything!

DOLLY. He didn't have sense enough to come in outa the rain when we knew him.

RUBY. I suppose you've heard how Fred Link is knockin' 'em for a row of ash-cans on the Other Side. . . . Got a picture comp'ny of his own and writes his own contract. I met Solly Goldman in at the N.V.A. the other day—said Fred was touted to play leads with Pola Negri. I guess he's not gettin' on!

DOLLY. That sure was a great gang! At least, they all seemed great to me then. It was my first job. . . .

RUBY. I'll never forget the first day I saw you. It was in Omaha, or was it K.C.?

DOLLY. K.C. One of the girls got ptomaine, and Jake wires me to join the show. The thrill of my life!

RUBY. You sure were a pretty little thing; I remember you wore a purple hat with a flame-colored ostrich plume.

DOLLY. God, I was green . . . !

RUBY. But it didn't take you long to get wised up.

(BERT *tries to get a word in but the two women go on completely oblivious of him.*)

DOLLY. Yeh, but you know why? Because you were so white about showin' me the ropes, and keepin' my courage up. I'd a quit at the end o' that first week if you hadn't give me a talking-to.

RUBY. I didn't do no more than anyone would of.

DOLLY. Oh, yes you did. You were the only one at first that even give me a pleasant look.

RUBY. I just showed you how the routine went.

DOLLY. Well, what you done I've never forgot. . . . I may have forgot you for a while, but I never forgot your helpin' me. And I ain't never stopped bein' grateful either, Ruby.

(BERT *has endured these reminiscences as long as he can.*)

BERT (*barking*). Ain't you two had about enough o' that!

RUBY. You keep outa this, Bert La Motte! It's none of your business. We'll talk all night if we want to.

(BERT *continues his sulking.*)

DOLLY. After all you've done for me. . . . And to think I almost took him away from you! It must of been the gin.

RUBY (*looking hard at* BERT). You'd a been doin' me a favor to take him.

BERT (*ineffectually*). Oh, she would, would she!

DOLLY. Thank God, I found out about it in time. Just know this, Ruby, I wouldn't do anything to hurt or harm a hair o' yours for anything in the world. Your husband give me such a rush over at Pete's to-night that I sorta lost my head. But you can betcha I got my senses back now. And just to show you I mean it, I'll beat it right now and give you my word never to speak to him again.

BERT. What was I ever thinkin' of to bring you up here in the first place. . . !

RUBY. I'm tickled to death you did——

DOLLY. Else how would we ever 'a met again, Ruby?

RUBY (*warmly*). It's great to see you again. . . .

DOLLY (*taking* RUBY'S *hand*). I'm over at the La France—layin' off this week. Call me up and for lunch.

(*Suddenly a delicious bit of revenge comes into* RUBY'S *mind. She surreptitiously nudges* DOLLY.)

RUBY. It's so late gettin' back to your hotel, why don't you stay here the rest o' the night? We can have a good long talk about old times.

(DOLLY *at first is on the point of refusing, then the idea does not seem so preposterous.*)

DOLLY. Why, I don't know. . . .

RUBY. Come on, stay. (*Indicating* BERT'S *bed.*) Here's a nice bed all to yourself. We'll send Bert out for sinkers and coffee in the morning.

BERT (*flabbergasted*). Where do you think I'm gonna sleep?

RUBY (*carelessly*). Oh, on the floor. . . . Or if you'd rather there's a sofa in the parlor.

(BERT *starts to make a stinging reply, but only succeeds in sputtering instead.*)

DOLLY (*egged on by* RUBY). I'd love to stay if you don't think I'd be puttin' anyone out.

RUBY. Bert don't mind. Not when it's for *you*. . . .

BERT. The Hell I don't!

(*He dashes angrily from the room, slamming the door.* RUBY *and* DOLLY *break into laughter.*)

DOLLY. That's the way—treat 'em rough!

RUBY. He won't forget this night in a hurry. That sofa's hunch-backed . . . !

(RUBY, *convulsed, sinks back against the pillows.*)

CURTAIN

THE SAME OLD THING

BY

ROI COOPER MEGRUE

ROI COOPER MEGRUE

Roi Cooper Megrue was born in 1883, in New York City; was educated at Trinity School, New York, and Columbia University. His first play, *The Same Old Thing*, included in this volume, marked the first of the plays with a trick surprise ending, the type which had become current in late seasons. It ran for three years in this country and England. Mr. Megrue's first long play was *Under Cover*. This was followed by *It Pays to Advertise* (with Walter Hackett) in the same year. *Seven Chances*, and *Under Sentence* (with Irvin S. Cobb) followed in 1916. *Where Poppies Bloom, Tea for Three* (1918), and *Honors Are Even* (1921) are among his latest plays.

Published plays: *The Same Old Thing; Under Cover; It Pays to Advertise; Under Fire; Seven Chances; Tea for Three;* and *Honors Are Even.*

CHARACTERS

SHE [PEGGY HALE], *an actress*

HE [BILLY], *an admirer*

THE OTHER MAN, *her husband*

THE AUTHOR

JULIA

SCENE: *Her boudoir.*

TIME: *Evening.*

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THE SAME OLD THING

A handsomely furnished sitting-room in PEGGY'S *hotel. There are doors right, left, and center, that on the left partially concealed by curtains.*

A fireplace on the right, an easy-chair near it. A writing-desk to the right, with a chair. Couch, table, other furniture here and there.

At rise of curtain, the door bell rings. Enter JULIA *right. She goes to door center, answers the bell and takes in some letters which she puts on table. The telephone rings.* JULIA *crosses to it.*

JULIA (*in phone*). Hello. No, Miss Hale hasn't come in yet from the theater. It's eleven-thirty now. She should be here in a quarter of an hour. No, sir, I don't believe she'll see you or any one to-night. You'll call up again? Very good, sir. (*She rings off. The door bell rings. She answers it and takes in some flowers.*) It must be wonderful to be a popular actress. (SHE *enters and takes flowers.*)

SHE. From Billy? (*She buries her face in them.*)

JULIA. Yes, madam; he called up and said he'd telephone later.

SHE. I won't be in to him, Julia. I'm tired to-night—tired of the world, the flesh, and acting and Billy.

JULIA. Here are your letters, madam. (SHE *is sitting in front of the desk. She picks up a letter from the pile, reads it.*)

SHE. "I saw your play Saturday afternoon. You were perfect and my ideal of all that a woman should be. I adore you and Oh, won't you send me an autographed photograph?

I am going to see the play again next week and if I sit in a box will you smile at me?"

(*She gives a half-pathetic little laugh and puts the letters down. She picks up another letter and reads fragments.*)

"It must be fascinating to be an actress. I have always made a real hit in our comedy club and everybody says I ught to go on the stage. Won't you help me to be an actress just like you?" Poor, foolish little girls. "I think you are the greatest actress I ever saw. I thought your play was fine"—what a charming letter. "P. S. Can you lend me ten dollars?"

(*She reads the remaining letter, touches her lips to it, murmurs "Billy," puts it aside and then tears the other letters up. The phone rings.* JULIA *answers it.*)

JULIA. It's the gentleman who calls so often.

SHE. I told you I'm out.

JULIA. Miss Hale is out. . . . He says he wants you to tell him that.

SHE (*at phone*). Billy, I'm out. Good-night. (*The phone rings hard.*) You can go, Julia. (JULIA *exits. She takes up phone again.*) I tell you, Billy, you can't come upstairs. Good-night.

(*She rings off. She lights a cigarette and goes out Right. As she goes, there is the sound of a key clicking in the lock of the door Center. The door is softly opened and* THE OTHER MAN *enters. He crosses over to table, picks up the letter from* BILLY, *crumples it angrily. Hears a knock at the door Center, hears her singing a little snatch of song, and exits quietly and quickly off Left, drawing portière curtains after him. The knocking at door continues, and* SHE *enters.*)

SHE. Yes?

HE (*outside*). May I come in——?

SHE. No. I told you I was out.

HE (*with satisfaction*). But mayn't I come in, please?

SHE. No, I told you before you were coming too often.

HE (*persuasively*). Please.

SHE (*opening the door*). As long as you are here—well, persistent one——(*curtseying*) the gentleman from the *Recorder* is welcome, but really, my dear man, you should never chase a woman or a street car—there is always another along in a couple of minutes.

HE. But if you wait, the next one may already be overcrowded.

SHE. Then hang on, competition is the life of flirting—for the woman.

HE. But it sets such a pace for the man.

SHE. Women like to be pursued.

HE. Then after all, that justifies my presence.

SHE (*changing the subject*). If you *were* a reporter, what would you be saying now?

HE. Oh, I should interview you as to whether actresses are happily married, and is acting more immoral than stenography and——

SHE. —and whether love is worth while and why——

HE. Don't make fun of love—love is a big motive. Every man is doing his work for some woman.

SHE. Is he? I wonder. I wonder if he isn't often playing the game for the sake of the game itself. (HE *starts to interrupt.*) And even if he isn't, he isn't always thinking of his wife.

HE. I didn't say wife, I said woman.

SHE. Well, even so, he isn't with her all the time, he's doing real things. He's in the big romance of brains; for it is brains that make the world go round, love makes it slide. I'm sick of the word love. (*There is a pause.* SHE *leans forward and takes his hand.*) Talk to me, the world seems drab to-night. I want to be amused, Mr. Reporter Man.

HE. Why this new title of reporter?

SHE. I decided on it to-night as an explanation to the night clerk, alias Mr. Grundy, of why you call so often and stay so long.

HE. But what do you care for suave Mr. Grundy?

SHE. It isn't that, but I am an actress, or at least I'm on the stage and in the public eye, and the glass before that eye isn't smoked. It's a microscope that magnifies a hand-clasp into an intrigue, makes white black, and turns pink into scarlet. Miss Collamore must be—*careful!* Discretion covers a multitude of sins.

HE. Go on talking, you've been doing it rather well.

SHE. I wonder why you expect me to say as witty and clever things off the stage as I do on, where it's some one else who has written the clever things for me?

HE (*earnestly, leaning forward*). You let me come to-night because you were—lonely.

SHE (*gaily*). I find I ought to have added to your list of virtues that of perception—usually God gives that to my sex.

HE (*earnestly*). You may joke about it, but you *were* lonely; it's a tragic thing to be really lonely, *I know.*

SHE. *You* know?

HE. I do—I've been so lonely—good God—I've—— (HE *breaks off.*) Well, you understand—but since I have come to know you, I've not been so alone.

SHE (*softly*). That's good. I'm glad to know I've meant that to you, too. And I haven't been so lonely, either—with you. (SHE *looks at* HIM.) (*Going to* HER.)

HE. Peggy! (HE *makes to take* HER *in his arms.*)

SHE. No, don't—that would spoil it. It isn't so much that I'd seriously mind a kiss. That doesn't represent very much to me any more.

HE. It represents a good deal to me.

SHE (*softly*). Behave!—All it ought to stand for has gone—the bloom is off—(*Wistfully.*) You see, I've been kissed so often for so many years by so many men.

HE. What?

SHE. Yes. Every night and twice on matinee days, so that to me there isn't much more sentiment in it than in shaking hands.

HE (*leaning close to* HER). Let's shake hands. (SHE *moves away.*) How illogical you are. If it has no importance to you, then what's the objection?

SHE (*a little sadly*). I'm so afraid you'll lose your respect for me. And I should be very lonely without you to talk to. So often, though we actresses mean nothing by it, men misunderstand and take our little demonstrations and superficial impulses as indications of—a loving temperament. We actresses do become unconventional. You see, we live so much in our emotions, and familiarity with affection breeds contempt.

HE. But *I* wouldn't misunderstand.

SHE. The old masculine plea: "with *you* it's different"—but (*smiling*) I shan't give you the chance to misunderstand. (*Seriously.*) I've had too much loneliness to risk our friendship.

HE. But you oughtn't to be lonely.

SHE (*quickly*). Why not, if you are?

HE. Oh, it's different with me. I'm not on the stage, with its gaiety and admiration.

SHE. Ah, yes, you and the public think of us as moths around the candle, getting singed perhaps a little now and then, but ever in the light: gay little pleasure-seeking, pleasure-finding butterflies. But really, we're very human and we suffer—*much.*

HE (*softly*). Poor little butterfly.

SHE. Cursed with a brain.

HE. And damned with a husband.

SHE. Oh, I'm sorry you said that. Up to now I was thanking you all the time because you had left him out of our discussions, and hadn't referred to the wronged wife.

HE (*not meaning it*). I'm sorry.

SHE. Yes, you sound so. And think how disappointed my kind public would be if I *were* happy with my husband! No actress is supposed to be happily married.

HE (*cynically*). Few are, I fancy.

SHE (*laughing*). You see, there sounds the voice of the public, and if Jim and I were a loving couple—you can't imagine how resentful the public is when facts contradict its theories. (*Rising.*) Heigh-ho, why have you let me ramble on like this?

HE (*crossing to her*). I must be a congenial soul.

SHE. Oh, you are. (*There is a long pause.*)

HE (*suddenly*). You're desperately lonely, so am I, why don't we cut it all and go away together?

SHE (*moving away*). You're very amusing.

HE (*unheedingly*). You've admitted it in every word you've said that the public doesn't give you credit for what I know you are—*a good woman.*

SHE (*gently*). Thank you for realizing that I *am* that——

HE. You admit you haven't the conventional idea of things; why not the game as well as the name? We've both a right to happiness, we——

SHE. The same old arguments about the same old thing. If there'd been a lover in Eden he would have said them to Eve.

HE (*coming close to her*). What you've said to-night has made me realize for the first time that you are unhappy. I'm not to be put off. I *can* make you happy.

SHE (*looking up at him audaciously*). Prove it to me. (HE *suddenly seizes her in his arms and kisses her passionately.* SHE *doesn't struggle. He releases her.*)

HE (*covering his eyes*). I'm sorry, forgive me.

SHE (*not indignant, but cool and self-possessed*). You needn't be sorry! It was nice in its way and of its kind, a convincing proof, but we couldn't be kissing all the time; what about the lonely intermissions?

HE. Words, words, words. (HE *kisses her again.*)

SHE (*quickly releasing herself*). Evidently you think we could be kissing *most* of the time.

HE (*irritated*). You seem to take it very humorously.

SHE (*rather [illegible]*). Kissing, as I said, doesn't mean very much to me, but *unfortunately*, my broad views

are not shared by my husband. Suppose he should suddenly appear?

HE. Oh, but he won't, I know exactly where he is.

SHE. I'm glad you do . . . I don't. Of course, it would be in very bad taste if he did come in.

HE. Good Heavens, you are treating my love as a joke.

SHE (*serious now*). Exactly as you are treating my good name and my sense of decency.

HE. But I'm serious.

SHE. So am I.

HE. We can go away now.

SHE (*meaningly*). But suppose my husband did come, what would *you* do?

HE (*coming close to her*). I'd fight for you. I'd take you in my arms—like this—— (HE *takes her in his arms and gives her a long kiss, but this time she struggles.*)

SHE (*pulling, releasing herself and pushing him away*). How dare you! Without going into heroics I've tried to show you that you must not do that; tried to stop you, and you might save your self-respect, that this might not be the end of it all. But it *is* the end.

HE (*with force*). By God, it isn't! You're a woman and I'm a man and I love you. (HE *tries to take her in his arms again.* SHE *stops him.*) You're coming away with me.

SHE. I'm not.

HE. You are.

SHE. No.

HE. Yes. You've let me come here for hours to talk to you—to sit by you, and you've let me love you. (HE *draws close to her.*) I'll do anything to get you honorably or dishonorably—I don't care—it's you. The feel of you in my arms just now—lip on lip—heart on heart—I'd give up my body and soul for you. (HE *turns to seize her,* SHE *eludes him,* HE *follows;* SHE *gets behind sofa.*)

SHE. Billy, you're mad!

HE. I am—mad for you——

SHE. Please, Billy.

HE. It's the desire of months that came in me now, the self-control of months went in just that instant, with you in my arms. (HE *tries to take her in his arms.* SHE *eludes him again but trips on a corner of the lounge and sinks down.* HE *sits beside her and tries to kiss her.* SHE *strikes him in the face and rises.*)

SHE (*suddenly starting*). Ssh, what was that? It was my husband—he's coming up the stairs.

HE. No, you can't fool me that way. It was the maid or the butler.

SHE. But if it *were* he——

HE. Then either he'll kill me or I'll kill him, because after to-night I can't, I won't go out of this room without you.

SHE (*whispering*). The hall door slammed. It *is* he.

HE. I wonder? Some one is coming—I believe it is your husband. (HE *draws a revolver from his pocket.*) I'll kill him, I'll kill you. (SHE *falls on floor in front of him sobbing.*)

SHE. You mustn't, Billy, you mustn't. For God's sake, don't! You mustn't. (SHE *seizes hold of his knees, hysterically.*) Don't, don't, they'll kill you for it. I want you to live, Billy—for me.

(*With his left hand* HE *breaks her hold and* SHE *falls on the floor prostrate.* HE *moves a step or two nearer the door C., raises his revolver and points it toward the door, muttering.*)

HE. I'll kill him.

(SHE *slowly raises herself and throws her arms around him, pinning his arms to her side. Tensely, screaming.*)

SHE. Billy, Billy, I love you! Don't shoot him down without giving him a chance. Don't, I'd hate you.

HE (*roughly*). What are you doing? (HE *is struggling to get free and is half mad with passion and emotion.*) Don't try to stop me, I want you and I'll have you. (SHE *clings tight.*)

SHE. Don't kill him, [illegible] way. I'll come with you. Don't. (SHE *grabs him around the neck and pulls his collar*

off.) Listen. You wanted to kiss me just now and I wouldn't, but I want you to—now. (*They kiss a long kiss.* SHE *pulls back her head as if frightened.*) Ssh, I'm frightened, Billy, I'm frightened. He's coming, I hear him, Billy; you mustn't, you mustn't, because I love you, Billy, I love you.

HE. Now for it. (HE *aims and pulls back hammer of revolver. It clicks.*)

(THE OTHER MAN *comes in from the door Left with revolver aimed.*)

AUTHOR (*in audience*). Get out. *Get out*, for heaven's sake get out!

THE OTHER MAN. What's the matter?

AUTHOR. You came in too soon. I want more suspense there——

OTHER MAN. Well, that's the way you rehearsed it yesterday. (*He goes out.*)

SHE. Even if you are the author, I wish you'd not interrupt my rehearsal that way—you startled even me. Oh, I wondered why I was so bad to-night.

AUTHOR. Yes, I wondered too, but never mind,—shall we try the scene again?

SHE. I can't now, I'm all upset, I've lost my inspiration—— (*They get back in their former positions.*)

AUTHOR. Put your head on his down-stage shoulder, Miss Hale, you're the leading lady, let the audience see you.

SHE. Well, that isn't the way I feel it.

AUTHOR. Well, it's the way I wrote it.

HE. Any suggestions for me?

AUTHOR. Yes, you make love like——

SHE (*interrupting*). Please don't swear before all those people—I invited them to this dress rehearsal.

AUTHOR. Oh, I apologize—but can't you really kiss her instead of showing you're jealous that she's the star and you're only the leading man?

HE. I can only act the way I feel. I——

AUTHOR. That's just the trouble. Act the way you *don't* feel—make believe you love her and take this new line.

SHE. If you're going to give him more lines! Well, please remember that this is supposed to be a woman's play. People come here to see me—not him.

AUTHOR. Don't get emotional—please keep it for the play.

HE. She *is* emotional—look at my collar.

AUTHOR. Let's try the scene again.

SHE. Where from?

AUTHOR. Where you grab the gun from him.

HE. Oh, yes, where I say I'll kill him. (HE *and* SHE *go over struggle,* HE *saying, "I'll kill him." She saying, "No, no, for my sake don't kill him."* BILLY *suddenly stops struggle, pushes her away from him, and begins brushing powder off his coat.*) You know this coat isn't a towel.

AUTHOR. Oh, go ahead with the scene. (*He grabs her roughly, saying, "I'll kill her, I mean him," and pushes her to chair Left of desk Right Center on which she has placed his hat.* SHE *sits on hat—*HE *points pistol toward door Center.*)

HE. I'll kill him as he enters that door. (*Long pause.*) Well, are you going to let me stand here until I take root? (SHE *slowly gets up from chair—sees crushed hat—picks it up and offers it to* BILLY—*he takes it.*)

SHE. I think I sat on your hat.

HE. Not really?

AUTHOR. My, she's growing intelligent—she thinks she sat on his hat———

HE (*to her*). I suppose you think that was a clever thing to do?

SHE. I didn't do it on purpose.

HE (*picking up hat and turning to* AUTHOR). I leave it to you———

AUTHOR. Don't leave it to me—I don't want it.

HE. Look at this hat—ten dollars gone. Honest, old man—that woman has the smallest brain in captivity.

AUTHOR. You flatter her———

SHE. I can't go on, I'm so upset. You're trying to humiliate me before all my friends.

AUTHOR. What do I care for your friends? I want to make this play a success. It's my bread and butter.

SHE. Well, it's stale bread and butter. It's just the same old thing: husband, wife and lover. (*With sudden inspiration.*) Why not make it a novelty by having me shoot my husband as he comes in that door?

HE (*protesting*). That's my one big scene.

AUTHOR. You can't shoot your own husband.

SHE. It's very human—I'll bet lots of wives would like to.

AUTHOR. But it would ruin the play. Great Heavens—this is the limit. I've made every fool change.

SHE (*excitedly*). Every fool change—you hear that? How dare you!

HE. How dare you insult this lady?

AUTHOR. But all the people out here I'm sure agree that you'd lose all sympathy if you shot your own husband.

SHE. I'm a free woman I won't listen to any one's suggestions, I know I'm right.

AUTHOR. You ought to play this part the way I wrote it.

SHE. I'll play the part the way I feel it.

AUTHOR. Allow me to say, sweet lady, you're feeling very badly.

SHE. Humph, you're only the author.

AUTHOR. But my contract provided ——

SHE. I don't care for your contract, I won't produce your piece. I'm through.

HE. And this is the first engagement I've had this season.

AUTHOR. Now, Miss Hale, please. You're overwrought and unstrung.

SHE. I'm not, I'm not. (*To audience.*) My friends, I'm sorry that you should have been forced to witness this scene, but you can see how in the wrong he is.

THE OTHER MAN (*putting his head in at the door*). Say, how long do you want me to wait out here?

ALL THREE. Get out! (THE OTHER MAN *disappears.*)

HE. Miss Hale, please—if you'll just listen to me——

SHE. You're discharged.

HE. What have I done?

SHE. Done? You've stood there agreeing with every word he's said.

AUTHOR. You see, Jack, she's an impossible woman.

SHE. Impossible—I suppose I ought to have gone to a real playwright like Charles Klein or Gus Thomas!

AUTHOR. Well, they're welcome to you. You couldn't play this part in a thousand years.

HE. She might if she rehearsed it that long. (HE *exits.*)

SHE. There—my leading man's gone. How dare you discharge him?

AUTHOR. I discharge him? I'm through; you're impossible.

SHE. I wonder where I can find an author who can really suit me?

AUTHOR. Only in heaven.

SHE. Well, there's one consolation—I'll never meet you there—your ability takes you some place else——

AUTHOR. Where?

SHE. I'm too much of a lady to tell you——

AUTHOR. That's final. I won't stand here and have you talk to me that way. Strike! (AUTHOR *yells "Strike!" Stage hands strike scene and clear as quickly as possible—leaving chair and table Left Center. This is done during following dialogue.*) Ring down your curtain—throw off your lights—(*calling to Prompter*) Give me my play— (*Prompter starts to hand play over footlights*—SHE *interrupts and snatches manuscript from him.*)

SHE. Don't you dare give him that play! I bought and paid for this and I'll produce it—but I *will* shoot my own husband.

AUTHOR. I'll get it—you wait and see! (*Exits through orchestra pit under stage.*)

SHE. I'll shoot him—it's the only way to get rid of him. Wasn't I good in this play, I ask you—all of you?

(*Goes to chair Right of table Left Center starts to sit as*

stage hand pulls chair from under her—and then she sits n floor——)

CURTAIN

(SECOND CURTAIN: SHE *is seen sitting on floor, raging at stage hands who pay no attention to her as they keep on striking the set.*)

FINALE

RED CARNATIONS

BY

GLENN HUGHES

GLENN HUGHES

Glenn Hughes was born in Nebraska in 1894. In 1908 he removed with his family to California. He was graduated from Stanford University in 1916. He then served as director of plays of the Forest Theater at Carmel-by-the-Sea. In 1920 he became a member of the faculty of the University of Washington, where he founded a school of the theater, establishing courses in playwriting, producing, etc. For several years he was director of the University plays. He is at present assistant professor of English and Dramatic Art, and divides his time equally between drama and poetry.

Published plays: *Pierrot's Mother; Bottled in Bond; Three Japanese Plays* (with Y. T. Iwasaki); *Miguel; Lady Fingers; Harlequinade; Red Carnations.*

CHARACTERS

A Man
A Boy
A Girl

Scene: *A secluded corner in a city park.*

Time: *An afternoon. The present.*

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RED CARNATIONS

A secluded corner in a city park. A bench center. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon. The MAN *is seated at left end of bench, smoking a cigar. He is middle-aged, prosperous in appearance, and wears a red carnation in his lapel. The* BOY *enters immediately after rise of curtain, from right. He is about twenty, well dressed without being foppish. He, too, wears a red carnation in his lapel. He looks around as if expecting to meet someone. He and the* MAN *exchange glances, none too friendly. The* BOY *moves right again, stops, and assumes an easy posture. He lights a cigarette.*

MAN. Might as well sit down. Plenty of room on the bench. (*He shifts a little more to the left.*)

BOY (*starting and talking as though thinking of other things*). Oh, thanks. Thanks very much. I don't mind standing. It will only be for a minute or two.

MAN (*looking quizzically at him*). You're not expecting to meet a woman, then?

BOY (*diffidently*). Well . . . why, yes, as a matter of fact, I am.

MAN (*wisely*). You are an optimist.

BOY. Pardon me?

MAN. I merely remarked that you were an optimist.

BOY. I'm afraid I don't understand.

MAN. No; but you will later on, when your one or two minutes have turned into one or two hours. I see you don't know very much about the feminine sex.

BOY. Perhaps not. On the other hand, it strikes me that your remarks are rather personal.

MAN. Well, the only remarks worth making *are* personal. However, if you prefer talking about the *weather* . . .

BOY (*who is looking at his watch*). Five minutes past. . . . (*Looks offstage right and left, then vaguely remembers the* MAN'S *speech.*) I . . . ah, yes, quite right. I am sorry. I was thinking of something else.

MAN. So I perceive. She is already five minutes late.

BOY (*surprised*). How did you know that?

MAN. Experience. Experience. Romance is like history; it repeats itself. Besides, I am in the same boat with you. My appointment was for five minutes ago, also. The only difference is that I am not worrying about it, and you are.

BOY (*crossing to bench*). I think I will sit down, if you don't mind. It's a devil of a bore standing first on one foot and then on the other. (*He sits down on right end of bench.*)

MAN. Have a cigar?

BOY. No, thanks; I'll just finish this cigarette. (*He turns directly to the* MAN, *and as he does so, his eye lights on the carnation in the other's lapel. He shows annoyance. He takes the one from his own lapel, hesitates a moment, then replaces it. The* MAN, *noticing the action, smells his.*)

MAN. Pretty flowers, carnations, aren't they? Wonderful fragrance they have, too. I am very fond of them, and I see your taste runs in the same direction.

BOY (*disturbed*). Yes, indeed. Very fine flower. But I . . . well, I hope you won't think me silly, but as a matter of fact, if it doesn't make any difference to you, would you mind keeping your carnation out of sight for a while, until . . . well, just to be a good sport, if you would hide it for a few minutes, I'd be very grateful.

MAN (*good-naturedly*). Now, I'd like nothing better than to do you a favor, Mr.—Mr.——

BOY. Smith.

MAN. Thank you, Mr. Smith. That's strange. Very strange!

BOY. What is strange? The name of Smith

MAN. Yes, strange that you should have it, when that is my name, too.

BOY. Oh, your name is Smith, too? Well, after all, there are lots of us in the world—lots of us Smiths, I mean—so there is no reason why such a coincidence . . .

MAN. Of course not, of course not . . . only, I was thinking about the red carnations.

BOY. Well, I don't see . . .

MAN. I may be mistaken, of course. But two Smiths, meeting in the same spot at the same hour, both wearing red carnations! You must confess it's a bit . . .

BOY. By Jove! So it is! (*He looks intently, suspiciously, at the* MAN.) I wish you could move to another spot, or take that flower out of your lapel, or . . . It isn't absolutely necessary for you to wear it, is it?

MAN. But it is! Absolutely! And you are going to cause me all sorts of trouble if *you* don't move, or change your name, or at least throw away your carnation.

BOY. I shall do nothing of the kind. I can't! My Lord, man, she doesn't know me! That is, she doesn't know what I look like. That is why she asked me to wear a red carnation.

MAN. But that is exactly *my* predicament. The woman *I* am to meet does not know *me* by sight. She asked *me* to wear a red carnation. So you see, I can't help you out. After all, a man must look to his own affairs first.

BOY. What a beastly coincidence! (*Brightening.*) Oh, well, it may not matter. One of them will arrive before the other does. If you recognize her as your—ah . . . friend . . . you can speak up at once, and get on out of the way. If mine should arrive first, I shall do the same.

MAN (*thinking deeply*). Hmmm! You know your . . . ah, *friend* . . . when you see her, do you?

BOY (*startled*). Why . . . well . . . in a way. That is, her eyes. I would know her eyes anywhere.

MAN. Her eyes! Good heavens!

BOY. Well, you must understand that when a woman is in costume, and wears a mask . . .

MAN. In costume, and masked!

BOY. Certainly. Why not? I met her at a masked ball. There is nothing unusual about that, is there?

MAN. This is uncanny! Positively uncanny! (*Dramatically.*) Tell me one thing: what kind of costume did she wear?

BOY. She was dressed as the Queen of Sheba.

MAN. My God!

BOY. What's the matter?

MAN (*trying to recover*). Nothing! Nothing. (*More to himself.*) I won't believe it! It's impossible!

BOY. What is impossible?

MAN. Nothing is impossible!

(*The* GIRL *trips briskly in from left. She is dressed smartly in afternoon clothes, and wears a hat which shades her eyes, with perhaps a little veil dangling from the brim. She pauses, looks shyly at the* MAN *and* BOY, *who turn and stare at her, bewildered. Neither the* MAN *nor* BOY *makes a move. They eye each other. The* GIRL, *with an embarrassed little cough, walks on past them, not stopping until she is at stage right. The* MAN *and* BOY *look after her, then at each other.*)

MAN. Is she . . . ?

BOY (*looking hard at the girl*). I think so. But confound it! I couldn't see her eyes.

MAN. I am certain she is my friend.

BOY. What? You are!

MAN. From the way she holds her head.

BOY. But I am quite sure I recognize her as my friend. If I could only get a glimpse of her eyes!

MAN. The only way to settle the matter, as I see it, is to call her by name. I suggest you try first.

BOY. I can't. I don't know her name.

MAN. You mean you don't know the name of the woman you were to meet here?

BOY. She wouldn't tell me what her name was. You'll have to go ahead and see if she belongs to you.

MAN. I must confess, this grows more and more unbelievable. The truth of the matter is, I don't know the name of the one *I* was to meet.

BOY. Good heavens! This is awful! Look here. We can't stand around all day debating the question. One of us must go ahead and break the ice. If he makes a mistake, he can retire and give the right one a chance.

(*The* GIRL, *meanwhile, has been powdering her nose, looking at herself in a tiny mirror, and from time to time, glancing over her shoulder at the* MAN *and* BOY.)

MAN. A very good solution. You, having suggested the plan, should have the privilege of trying it out. I shall wait here where I can keep an eye on you, though. Good luck to you!

BOY (*starting to go, then turning back to* MAN). But what the deuce am I to say to her?

MAN. Ask her if you are the man she expected to meet here?

BOY. But what if she doesn't know?

MAN. What?

BOY. She may not know whether I am the one or not.

MAN. That is her worry—not yours. You can at least give her a chance to claim you.

BOY. But she might make a mistake!

MAN. Oh, Lord! Are you going or aren't you?

BOY. Yes, I am. (*Starts again to right. Turns back.*) Don't leave until I've found out, will you?

MAN. No, no! Of course not! Go on!

BOY. I'm going. (*He crosses to within a couple of steps of the* GIRL. *Pauses. She looks around at him and smiles prettily. He clears his throat and speaks.*) How do you do!

GIRL (*sweetly*). How do you do?

BOY (*cautiously*). I beg your pardon, but were you . . . that is . . . am I . . . what I mean to say is . . . I was expecting to meet someone here, and . . . I was wondering . . .

GIRL. Yes, I noticed you were wondering.

BOY (*disconcerted*). I suppose you think I am an idiot, but you see . . . well, with both of us wearing red carnations, and being here at the same spot at the same time, and . . .

GIRL. Yes, I observed that both of you were wearing red carnations. I think they are quite becoming.

BOY (*embarrassed*). Thanks, very much, but . . . Well, that isn't exactly the point. (*He laughs nervously.*)

GIRL (*laughing with him*). No, I suppose it isn't.

BOY. It's awfully difficult to explain.

GIRL (*sympathetically*). Yes, isn't it? (*She laughs again prettily.*)

BOY. Of course, if you really are the *one*—that is, the one I was to meet here, then, maybe you will understand. Do you?

GIRL. No; I don't think I do.

BOY (*crestfallen*). Oh! Then, I suppose you aren't the one?

GIRL. The one—what?

BOY. The one—I was to meet. Are you?

GIRL. Why, I'm sure I don't know.

BOY (*brightening*). Then you *were* to meet someone?

GIRL. Oh, yes.

BOY. That helps some. And would you know him if you were to see him?

GIRL (*shyly*). I'm afraid not. That is why I asked him to wear a red carnation.

BOY. Ah! That much is settled. But, of course, *he* (*pointing to* MAN) is wearing a red carnation, too.

GIRL. Yes. That does make it rather complicated, doesn't it?

BOY. Rather! So, you see, we'll have to think of some other way to identify him.

GIRL. Identify which? You or him?

BOY (*after a moment of bewilderment*). Me. No, not necessarily. Either one. The one you were intending to meet.

GIRL. That's it! We must identify the one I was intending to meet.

BOY. Can't you think of some way?

GIRL. I don't know. (*She thinks.*) Oh, of course! Why didn't I think of that before? (*Her face lights up.*) I can ask you your name?

BOY. Splendid! Go ahead and ask me.

GIRL. Well, then, is your name Smith?

BOY (*eagerly*). Yes!

MAN (*who has been standing apart at left, watching the scene with amusement, now speaks up loudly and emphatically*). So is mine!

BOY (*turning quickly, startled, to look at* MAN). Yes, yes. (*Then to* GIRL.) You see, that is another trouble I . . .

GIRL. What? Is his name Smith, too? Good heavens!

BOY. That's the point. (*Excitedly.*) If his name wasn't Smith there wouldn't be any difficulty at all.

GIRL (*to boy*). But how do you know *you* aren't the one to blame?

MAN (*coming forward slightly*). Exactly. If *your* name (*to* BOY) wasn't Smith, there would be no trouble whatever. I insist that you share the blame, at least.

GIRL. It's all a question of who is the original Smith.

BOY. What do you mean by the original Smith?

MAN. From the standpoint of time, I certainly am the original Smith. I carried the name long before *you* (*to* BOY) were born.

BOY. Ridiculous! What has that to do with it? The original Smith in this instance is the one who had the appointment with Miss —— I beg your pardon, but you never told me your name.

GIRL. No; I didn't, did I? (*She laughs contagiously.*) It seems a bit odd, but . . . as a matter of fact, I am not sure that I ever told *you* anything. Perhaps it was *he* (*pointing to* MAN) that I talked with.

BOY. Where? When?

GIRL. At the masked ball Friday night.

MAN. Why, of course, I am the one you talked with.

BOY (*looking at* MAN *in amazement*). You! You were there, too! My God! This is unbearable!

GIRL. Why shouldn't he have been there? He had as much right to be there as you had.

MAN. Certainly. Why should one Smith have preference over another?

BOY. I'll go mad in a minute! Look here! (*To the* GIRL.) You have got to settle this one way or the other. I refuse to stand here all day being made a fool of.

MAN. If you feel that way, you should leave at once. That would clear things up considerably.

BOY (*pugnaciously*). I shan't leave. Don't think you can get rid of me as easily as that! (*To the* GIRL.) There is some way for you to solve this problem. If you talked with one of us last Friday night at the masked ball, you must remember something that would tell you which of us it was. We are nothing alike. Look at him! (*Points to* MAN, *who assumes an heroic pose for a moment.*) How could you mistake him for me?

GIRL. But you forget that you were both in costume, and wore masks.

MAN. Quite true. Costumes and masks make a very complete disguise.

BOY. But costumes aren't all alike. I was dressed as a *sheik!*

MAN. So was I!

BOY. What! (*He is almost crying with rage.*) You weren't! This is too much! I won't believe it!

MAN. But I tell you I was. There is nothing remarkable about going to a fancy-dress ball in a sheik's costume. So far as I know, no one has a patent on that idea.

GIRL. Now that you mention it, I distinctly remember noticing more than one sheik at that ball.

BOY (*sarcastically to* GIRL). And I suppose you talked to every sheik you saw!

GIRL. Well, naturally, I couldn't be sure. It would be very easy to mistake one sheik for another.

BOY. And you told them all the same thing, I suppose?

GIRL. What do you mean?

BOY (*sarcastically*). You invited every sheik you talked with

to meet you here in this corner of the park at four o'clock, and to wear a red carnation in his coat lapel?

GIRL (*with spirit*). I did no such thing. The idea! He was the one who asked *me* to meet *him*.

MAN. Certainly. I asked her to meet me here to-day.

BOY. But so did I!

GIRL. You are both sure you asked me?

MAN. Positive!

BOY. Certain!

GIRL. But how *can* you be? How do you know that one of you didn't ask some other girl?

BOY. Weren't you dressed like the Queen of Sheba?

GIRL. Yes. That's right.

MAN. Of course she was. That's how she caught my eye.

BOY. Oh, damnation! I can't stand this! (*Turning on the* MAN, *savagely.*) How do you know there wasn't another Queen of Sheba at the ball?

MAN. Perhaps there was. But the point is, that there is only *one* Queen of Sheba *here*.

BOY. And you think you asked *this* Queen of Sheba (*indicating the* GIRL) to meet you here in the park at four o'clock today?

MAN (*sarcastically*). Your mind grows clearer every minute!

BOY. And you told her you would wear a red carnation in your coat lapel?

MAN. That is my customary method of identifying myself.

BOY. Well, I *fancy* this is the Queen of Sheba that I talked with. I can tell by her eyes. I would know those eyes anywhere. It means that she has made fools of us both, for I made the same proposals to her that you did, and she certainly accepted them.

GIRL. Oh, I am sorry! I thought you two were the same man.

BOY (*to the* MAN, *dully*). She thought we were the same man!

MAN. The compliment was mutual, at any rate.

BOY. Did you think we stuttered, that we should ask you the same thing twice?

GIRL. I thought you were a little—absentminded, perhaps.

MAN. Very tactful of you to put it so mildly.

GIRL. You must realize how sorry I am! But in the excitement of dancing . . . and the music . . . and everything . . . I must have . . . well, I am sorry!

BOY. Oh, we realize that.

MAN. Certainly.

GIRL. And you can see how easy it was to make a mistake, when both of you were named Smith, and were dressed like sheiks, and were partial to red carnations?

BOY. Of course.

MAN. Naturally.

GIRL. I suppose the question is now: what to do about it?

MAN. It *is* a rather embarrassing situation.

BOY. There is only one way to settle it: she must choose between us.

MAN. We might flip coins to see which of us stays.

BOY. No. I refuse to treat the matter in such a trivial way. If I leave, it will be at the request of the lady. (*He folds his arms defiantly.*)

MAN. Well, that relieves *us* of the responsibility. (*To the* GIRL.) What does "the lady" say?

GIRL. Oh, dear! I suppose I am caught now. What shall I do? Both of you are so *attractive*, and so very honorable about it! I never met two more charming men. (*To the* BOY.) If I were to ask you to leave, would you go?

BOY. Yes. I would stick to my word. But I would find you again sometime.

GIRL (*teasing him*). But how could you? You wouldn't know where to find me. You don't know my name or where I live, or anything about me. And the next time I go to a masked ball, I might not dress as the Queen of Sheba.

BOY. Never mind. I'll find you. And when I do, I'll make sure there isn't any other Smith around to interfere.

MAN. What an unkind remark!

GIRL. Oh, but there would be another Smith around. There

always is when I am present. You see, Smith is *my* name, too.

BOY (*bewildered*). What! It can't be!

GIRL. But it is. That's why I remembered *your* name so easily, (*to the* MAN) and *yours*. One can nearly always remember one's own name, even when it is attached to a stranger.

BOY (*angrily*). I quit. I'm through! I've been wasting my time with a pair of lunatics. Good-bye, Mr. Smith—and Miss Smith! (*He starts out right.*)

GIRL (*in sudden panic*). Oh, don't go! Please don't go! You mustn't desert us!

BOY (*almost offstage*). Good-bye!

GIRL (*turning to* MAN). Father! Stop him, please!

BOY (*stopping suddenly and turning back*). What was that?

GIRL (*pulling at the* MAN'S *elbow*). Father, don't stand there like a stick!

MAN (*torn between amusement and confusion*). Well, I . . . really, my dear, I think I have done my part. If you will excuse me, I think I'll . . . (*He breaks away and makes for extreme left.*)

BOY (*coming back swiftly to the* GIRL, *center*). What does this mean? Who *are* you, and who is that man?

GIRL (*penitently*). I am Miss Smith, and he is—Mr. Smith.

BOY (*sternly*). He is your father?

GIRL (*nodding her head copiously*). Um-hm! (*The* BOY *utters an exclamation and moves right. She watches him out of the corner of her eye.*) Are you *awfully* mad? (*No reply.*) Will you forgive me? (*No reply.*) Please! (*She slips over to his side and plucks at his coat-sleeve.*) I am sorry. But if *you* were my father, *you* wouldn't want me to meet strange men in the park without a chaperon, would you? Even the Queen of Sheba must use discretion. And wasn't father a sport to act his part so nicely? Just think: I planned the whole thing so it would be most exciting, and it *was* exciting, wasn't it?

BOY (*whirling around suddenly, seizes her and kisses her*). You little devil! I could strangle you!

MAN (*throwing up his hands, cries out*). The sheik!

GIRL (*trying to disengage herself*). Help! Father, he kissed me!

MAN (*coming over to them*). Serves you right. Bring him home to dinner with us, and maybe he'll kiss you again. (*To the* BOY.) Mr. Smith, will you accept an invitation to dinner at the Smith residence with Miss Smith and myself?

BOY (*gaily*). Delighted, Mr. Smith! (*To the* GIRL.) Miss Smith, will you take my arm? (*He bows. The* GIRL *takes his arm and they start off right. But the* BOY *stops suddenly, and turning back, addresses the* MAN.)

BOY. But see here! Aren't you taking rather a chance? You don't know a thing about me.

MAN. My boy, I know enough about you to write your biography.

BOY. But how could you?

MAN. I've known your father, J. Rodney Smith, for twenty years, and I've seen you on the golf course with him many a time. And even if I hadn't, I'd have known you; you're a dead ringer for your dad.

GIRL. How perfect it all is!

BOY. Well, I'll be . . . !

MAN. Yes; we'll all be—late for dinner! And I want to get home in time to mix the cocktails. Mr. Smith, I hope you drink?

BOY. Oh, yes, indeed! All the Smiths *do!*

(*They go out arm in arm, the* GIRL *between the* MAN *and the* BOY.)

QUICK CURTAIN

SAVED

BY

J. W. ROGERS, JR.

J. W. ROGERS, JR.

John William Rogers, Jr., was born at Dallas, Texas, in 1894. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1916. He was for some time in the publishing business, and is at present engaged in newspaper work in his native city.

Judge Lynch, his first produced play, won the David Belasco cup in the 1924 National Little Theatre Tournament at New York.

Published plays: *Judge Lynch; Saved; Wedding Presents.*

CHARACTERS

MISS MINNIE TREMAINE
MISS EMILY TREMAINE, *her sister*
MRS. SAUNDERS
MRS. BOSTICK
MISS ZILLA BIRDSONG
SUE TREMAINE, *niece of Misses Minnie and Emily*

SCENE: *The sitting-room of the Misses Tremaine, in a small town of the Old South.*

TIME: *The present.*

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SAVED

The sitting-room of the MISSES TREMAINE. *A quaint-looking old room full of some handsome early Victorian furniture with one or two really fine antique pieces—heirlooms in the* TREMAINE *family. The room would be home-like but for a certain immaculate primness that suggests a too frequent acquaintance with the broom and duster for the general comfort of whatever family has to use it.*

It is evident the MISSES TREMAINE *are famous for being "good housekeepers," and even an afternoon during which half a dozen members of "The King's Daughters" have been there sewing buttons and button-holes on missionary dresses, has failed to interfere with the "swept and garnished" stiffness of the place.*

When the play begins MISSES MINNIE *and* EMILY TREMAINE, MRS. BOSTICK, MISS ZILLA BIRDSONG *and* MRS. SAUNDERS *are seated about the room busy sewing and talking.* MRS. SAUNDERS *is seated at the center of the stage near the footlights, her right foot propped up on a stool, evidently injured. As the curtain rises she is speaking.*

MRS. SAUNDERS. Well, there she was with three dozen glasses of grape jelly that wouldn't have jelled if she'd set 'em under the North Pole for a week. Being a bride, she was awfully upset and had been crying. "It's lemons you need now, child, not tears," I said to her. And in five minutes we had the stuff back on the stove cooking.

MRS. BOSTICK. Grapes too ripe, I reckon. I always was afraid of grape jelly myself.

MISS EMILY. Speaking of grapes, Mrs. Saunders, that was a

fine sermon Dr. Saunders preached last Sunday on that text from Isaiah about "The winepress therein bringing forth wild grapes."

MRS. BOSTICK. Yes, wasn't it now? I declare, Mrs. Saunders, when Brother Saunders gets started I just rare back and listen and forget everything else in this world. I don't think we ever did have a preacher so plumb full of eloquence.

MISS ZILLA. I haven't missed church but two Sunday mornings in the whole three years you've been here.

MRS. BOSTICK. It must make you mighty proud, sometimes, to be married to a man like that!

MRS. SAUNDERS (*laughing*). Yes, it does—sometimes—Mrs. Bostick.

(MISS MINNIE, *who has given evidence of impatience since the rise of the curtain, gets up and goes to the window, looking down the street.*)

MISS EMILY. What is it, Sister Minnie?

MISS MINNIE. I'm looking for Sue. I asked her to try and get back early to-day.

MISS EMILY. Oh, she'll be along soon. Something's probably kept her at school.

(MISS MINNIE *continues to look out of the window as though reluctant to go back to her work until she gets a sight of* SUE *returning.*)

MISS ZILLA. How is Miss Sue? She loves to teach, doesn't she?

MISS EMILY. Sue's always been crazy about children since she was a little thing.

MRS. BOSTICK. Some girls are that way.

MRS. SAUNDERS (*smoothing out the child's plain dress on which she has been sewing a button-hole*). Well, now this one's finished. That was the last button-hole. (*Holding out the dress at arm's length, she surveys it thoughtfully.*) I wonder what poor little mountain child is going to wear it? I think you more than get paid working on missionary things like this, just wondering and imagining all the strange places

they're going to, and the lives they're going to help that you'll never know. Even if you can't go traveling off to China and Africa, you can sort of send part of yourself in work like this. I never did know anything that had more real romance to it than getting up a missionary box.

MRS. BOSTICK. Law, Mrs. Saunders, you have got imagination! I never would have thought of it like that.

MISS ZILLA. I think it's such a nice way to look at it.

MRS. SAUNDERS (*folding the garment up and making a move to get up*). Where's another one?

MISS EMILY (*eagerly, rising and coming to her*). No, don't you get up now. (*Motioning* MRS. SAUNDERS *back into the chair.*) The others are all done. I'll take that. I do wish you had let me bathe your ankle. (*Starting to lay the finished dress over with a pile of others.*)

MRS. SAUNDERS. Pshaw, it's nothing, Miss Emily. I feel absurd sitting like this with my foot all propped up. I only did it to humor Miss Minnie.

MISS ZILLA. You really ought to have let us bathe it when you first fell, Mrs. Saunders.

MRS. SAUNDERS. But it was just a little twist.

MISS ZILLA. Mrs. Bostick and I were coming down the street about half a block behind you. I saw you turn in at Miss Minnie's gate. Then I must have said something to Mrs. Bostick. I looked up again just after you'd fallen down, and I couldn't think what had become of you.

(MISS MINNIE *rises and goes to window, looking out again.*)

MRS. BOSTICK. Yes, I said to Zilla, "Why, where is she? She was there a moment ago."

MISS ZILLA. And then we saw you trying to get up.

MISS MINNIE. That loose brick? It was one just inside the gate, you said?

MRS. SAUNDERS. Yes, just inside. I think I caught my heel. You'll be thinking I've really sprained my ankle.

MISS MINNIE (*more to herself*). I didn't know any of those bricks were loose.

MISS EMILY. Now, sister, don't go fretting about Sue. Everything's all fixed and we don't need her. (*To the group.*) If you ladies will excuse me a few minutes— (*She goes out.*)

MISS MINNIE (*following her*). I'd better help you.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Miss Emily's a wonderful home-body. I don't believe there ever was a better cook.

MISS ZILLA. Yes, some man missed a mighty fine wife.

MRS. BOSTICK (*looking to see if* MISS EMILY *has gone*). Well, it wasn't for the want of one man trying to get her.

MISS ZILLA. You mean——?

MRS. BOSTICK. Frank Ellis.

MISS ZILLA. It seems to me I remember something about that—hearing a lot of talk when I was a girl growing up.

MRS. BOSTICK. There was plenty of talk, all right, about Miss Minnie breaking off the match. Everybody said she couldn't do it, but when Miss Minnie gets her head set she did, and as things turned out, I reckon it was best for Miss Emily after all.

MISS ZILLA. He's dead, isn't he?

MRS. BOSTICK. Law, Frank Ellis has been dead fifteen years. They say he died raving in one of those hospitals they used to have for drunkards.

MISS ZILLA. Maybe if she'd a married him, he wouldn't have been a drunkard.

MRS. BOSTICK. Now, Miss Zilla, you don't know men. Does she, Mrs. Saunders? That old talk about a reformed rake was got up by one of them that was trying to get a girl to marry him.

(MISS MINNIE *comes through the door with napkins.*)

MISS ZILLA (*rising*). Let me pass those, Miss Minnie.

MISS MINNIE (*handing her the napkins*). Thanks. (*Putting it the table by the window.*) Just clear that table for the tea-things, will you?

MRS. BOSTICK (*rising*). Can I help?

MISS MINNIE (*goes out*). No thank you, everything's ready.

MRS. BOSTICK (*going over and laying her dress on the sofa, then coming to the seat near* MRS. SAUNDERS. *She looks around to make sure* MISS MINNIE *is out of hearing and speaks in a lowered voice*). Miss Emily would have certainly married Frank if it hadn't been for Miss Minnie. But time does change us. More'n likely Miss Em' thanks her stars every night Miss Minnie saved her from making that bed to lie on.

(MISS EMILY *enters carrying a tray filled with tea-things which she sets down on the table, and begins to serve, pouring tea.*)

MRS. BOSTICK (*at a warning cough from* MRS. SAUNDERS, *as* MISS EMILY *enters. She speaks with a forced affability, which is the result of a guilty sense of talking too freely about someone while a guest in her house*). I thought I smelled some of your ginger-bread as soon as I came in this house. I got your recipe from Miss Minnie but I think she left something out to fool me.

(MISS ZILLA *stays by tea-table and carries tea as it is ready.*)

MISS EMILY. How will you have your tea, Mrs. Saunders, one or two lumps?

MRS. SAUNDERS. One, please.

MISS EMILY. And cream, or lemon?

MRS. SAUNDERS. Cream please. There isn't anybody can make ginger-bread or sunshine cake like you.

MISS ZILLA. Oh, Miss Em', I've been wanting the longest time to get your recipe for sunshine cake. Will you give it to me?

MISS EMILY (*to* MRS. BOSTICK). Cream or lemon, Ada?

MRS. BOSTICK. Give me cream. (MISS MINNIE *enters with a plate of cake, which she passes to* MRS. BOSTICK *and* MRS. SAUNDERS). I never did like that new-fangled notion of putting lemon in tea. It spoils it. Must have come from one of those heathen countries!

MISS MINNIE (*acidly*). Well, I always liked lemon in my tea and I'm not a heathen, either.

MRS. BOSTICK (*laughing*). No, Miss Minnie, but you always was a powerful body to have your own notions about things.

(MISS EMILY *serves* MISS ZILLA, MISS MINNIE *and herself, as expeditely as is natural.* MISS ZILLA *seats herself on sofa and* MISS MINNIE *in rocker at right of stage.*)

MISS EMILY (*as the noise of a door slamming is heard*). You've been worrying about Sue, sister. There she comes now.

(*As soon as everyone has tea,* SUE *enters, to be met with the usual greeting. She has a bundle of school papers under her arm. She is agitated about something, but trying to conceal it.*)

SUE (*entering*). Good-afternoon. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Bostick, Mrs. Saunders, Auntie. I'm sorry I'm late. Am I too late to help?

MISS MINNIE. What made you so late?

SUE (*rather lamely and in search of covering embarrassment*). Oh—er, you know how it always is when you plan——. Well, I'm here now anyway, Auntie. Can I get anything for anybody?

MISS EMILY. Nothing, dear.

MISS MINNIE. Hand Mrs. Saunders that ginger-bread, she's sprained her ankle.

(SUE *picks up the plate, but sets it down again with a slight start at* MRS. BOSTICK'S *words.*)

MRS. BOSTICK. She sprained it as she turned in your walk—on a brick.

SUE (*sharply*). Brick? Which brick?

MISS MINNIE. What a question! On a loose brick in the walk.

SUE (*trying to cover her confusion, picking up the plate and offering it to* MRS. SAUNDERS). Of course. I meant to say, I'm sorry.

MRS. SAUNDERS. It's nothing at all, Miss Sue. No, thank you.

(SUE *also offers cake to* MRS. BOSTICK, *who takes it out of her hand and sets it down on the table beside her, helping herself to a piece of it greedily.*)

MISS EMILY (*to* SUE). I didn't bring a cup for you. Get one.

SUE (*a look of worry crossing her face*). I don't believe I want anything just now.

MISS MINNIE (*eyeing her*). You're usually hungry enough when you get home.

SUE (*forcing back a lighter air*). Oh, I'll take something then. I'll go and lay off my things. (*She goes out left.*)

MRS. BOSTICK (*to* MISS MINNIE). I don't suppose Sue sees much of Carter Oakes these days. He's back in town a good deal this summer, I hear.

MISS MINNIE (*disapprovingly*). There is no reason for her to see anything of Carter Oakes.

MRS. BOSTICK. Well, there was a time—law, the way that boy made calf's eyes at Sue when they were in high school. And if you ask me, I always did think Sue was a little mite——

MISS MINNIE (*slightly irritated with* MRS. BOSTICK'S *persistence*). Whatever notion Sue may have had when she was a school-girl, she has more sense now.

MRS. BOSTICK. Well, Carter always was a good-looking, clean-appearing boy, and that does a heap of addle sense where girls are concerned.

MISS MINNIE. Good looks wear mighty poorly when you have to look at them three times a day.

MRS. BOSTICK. He's likely to do as well as any of 'em before he gets through. If I was Sue, and Carter looked at me——

MISS MINNIE (*frigidly*). You force me to remind you—Carter Oakes' grandfather came to this country as my father's overseer.

MRS. BOSTICK. Miss Minnie, you're awful proud, I know. But young things will be young things, in spite of grandfathers. (*Wisely.*) At least they used to be in my day.

MISS MINNIE. Well, Sue's not interested in Carter Oakes. You'll have to go somewhere else for your matchmaking, Ada Bostick.

MRS. SAUNDERS (*hoping to change the subject to more pleasant ground*). That young Mr. Oakes is an inventor, isn't he?

MISS ZILLA. I heard he was traveling with a circus.

MRS. BOSTICK. It ain't a circus. He goes about with fairs and carnivals and things, selling some sort of knife he's invented for cutting up vegetables. One of those knives that you can fix carrots with and make them look like tube roses, and peel fried potatoes like lover's knots.

MISS ZILLA. Oh, my cousin Laura Thompson had one of that kind once. They make vegetables real pretty.

MISS MINNIE. I should think they would be a lot of trouble to fix that way just for every day.

MRS. BOSTICK. They say Carter makes good money selling 'em.

MISS MINNIE (*sniffing*). Who says so? His mother? Peddling knives at fairs! Mighty poor business, I should say.

MRS. BOSTICK. He has big ideas. Some day he says he's going to have his own factory.

MISS MINNIE. Well, I expect it'll be a good while before he manufactures anything but talk. Peddling knives sounds like a mighty trifling business to me.

MISS ZILLA (*sitting herself up in her chair and craning out of the window*). Is that Mr. Tom Conner going by?

MISS MINNIE (*also craning*). Yes, it is. He hobbles like he was a hundred years old.

MRS. BOSTICK (*craning, looking out of window, then back to audience*). And he's only two years older than I am. (*Laughing.*) I know I can't look that old. (*Sits again.*) I don't feel old at all.

MISS ZILLA. How is Mrs. Conner's rheumatism?

MRS. BOSTICK. It does look like she would get better or die.

MISS EMILY. Can't I get you some more tea, Ada?

MRS. BOSTICK. No, thank you, Miss Em. But I will have

another square of that ginger-bread. (*Helps herself from plate beside her.*)

MISS ZILLA. Do you and Miss Minnie get over much to sit with Lizzie Conner?

MRS. BOSTICK. She ain't much company, I guess, but being neighbors——

MISS MINNIE. We try to do our duty by her.

MRS. BOSTICK. Lizzie is a good woman, even if she did always have a sharp tongue and no more tact than a bed-bug.

MISS EMILY. It would more than likely sharpen anybody's tongue to suffer like she's suffered.

MISS MINNIE. Oh, she had a sharp tongue before she ever had rheumatism.

MRS. BOSTICK. When she was Lizzie Davis she couldn't taste a pickle for sourness. I used to wonder how she ever got Tom Conner.

MISS ZILLA. I think he's a nice man.

MRS. BOSTICK. I declare, I think I'll drop in and see Lizzie a minute, as long as I'm right here so close. (*Rises.*)

MISS ZILLA. I'll go with you, Mrs. Bostick. That is, if you don't object?

MRS. BOSTICK. The more the merrier.

MISS EMILY. She's always wishing folks would come to see her oftener.

MRS. BOSTICK. Well, if we're going, I expect we'd better be getting along over there pretty soon. (*Rising.*) You won't mind our running right after eating, will you, Miss Minnie, when it's running to take an ox out of the ditch, as you might say?

MISS MINNIE. I'm not so sure Lizzie would be thanking you for likening her to an ox, but I know what you mean.

MISS ZILLA (*rising*). Well, we got a dozen of those dresses finished, and I think that's a lot. (*Everyone begins to rise.*)

MISS EMILY. I'll get them over to the church when we are ready to send the box off.

MISS ZILLA (*going*). You were going to give me that sun-

shine cake recipe, Miss Emily, don't forget. (*Goes out with* MISS EMILY.)

MISS EMILY (*going*). Oh, it's very simple. You make it just the same as you do angel food, only you beat up two yolks and put 'em in before you add your flour. (MISS ZILLA *questions her, and* MISS EMILY *explains her recipe in full pantomime as they move out into the hall.* MISS MINNIE *goes over to the door and waits for* MRS. BOSTICK *and* MRS. SAUNDERS *to start. In the hall,* MISS ZILLA *is busy with her wraps.* MRS. BOSTICK *starts toward the door, but* MRS. SAUNDERS, *who is standing, makes no move to leave.*)

MRS. BOSTICK (*turning back*). Why Mrs. Saunders, aren't you coming, too?

MRS. SAUNDERS (*hesitating as the ask other plans were on her mind*). Why, I—I——

MISS ZILLA (*stepping forward into the room again*). Oh, do stop in, if only for a minute, Mrs. Saunders,—unless your ankle's paining you?

MRS. SAUNDERS. It isn't my ankle. That's quite all right.

MRS. BOSTICK (*taking her arm*). Come on, then. It will cheer Lizzie to see you. (*Continues as she moves out.*) I always did love visiting shut-ins myself. They're so glad to get the news.

(MRS. SAUNDERS *moves with her, but drops a little behind and at the door, cast a stealthy glance at something, stops.*)

MRS. SAUNDERS. Go on, I'll be right with you. (*She comes quickly back into the room as she is speaking, stealthily lays down her purse, looking back to make sure no one is watching what she is doing. Then she hurries out to the others.*)

MRS. BOSTICK (*in the hall*). Tell Sue good-bye. (*Confused voices from the hall.*)

MRS. SAUNDERS. Good-bye Miss Minnie.

MISS ZILLA. Good-bye.

MISS MINNIE. Good-bye, Mrs. Saunders.

MISS ZILLA. Thank you for the recipe.

MISS EMILY. Come back when it isn't missionary work that brings you.

MISS MINNIE (*to* MRS. SAUNDERS). Watch out for the bricks this time.

(*While they were saying farewell,* SUE *comes back into the room, keeping out of sight, and listening to the voices. Her manner suggests that she is agitated and upset over something.*)

MISS MINNIE (*coming back with* MISS EMILY *after they have sped the guests and closed the door.*) Well, Sue, you might have at least come back and said good-bye. I don't know what they think.

SUE (*wearily*). I'm sorry. (*As* MISS EMILY *starts to put the dishes back on the tray.*) Let me do that, please, Aunt Em'. (*She begins to clear up while* MISS EMILY *puts on a cup or two but is more interested in listening to* MISS MINNIE.)

MISS MINNIE. I suppose I ought to take a plate of this ginger-bread over to Lizzie. She'll be asking them if we had anything to eat and feeling slighted if I don't.

MISS EMILY. I'll take it over.

MISS MINNIE. No, never mind, I'll go myself. I want to look at that walk. We might all of us be falling down and breaking our necks. I declare Ada Bostick gets worse and worse. A tongue in her head rattles like a cow-bell. Take those out first, Sue, you can't get everything on one tray; you'll be spilling 'em all if you try.

MISS EMILY (*as* SUE *starts out with filled tray*). I'll open the door for you.

SUE. Thanks. (*She goes out.*)

MISS MINNIE (*fuming*). The idea of Ada Bostick hinting there was something between Sue and that Oakes!

MISS EMILY (*timidly*). But, sister, you said yesterday you didn't understand Sue lately, and suspected —

MISS MINNIE. What I suspected has got nothing to do with Ada Bostick. (*Glancing out of the window.*) There's someone coming back again. (*They both look out the window.*)

Miss Emily (*looking*). Why, it's Mrs. Saunders.

Miss Minnie. I wonder what she wants?

Miss Emily. I'll let her in. (Miss Emily *goes into the hall and opens the door.*) Come in, Mrs. Saunders.

Mrs. Saunders (*coming in*). Thank you, Miss Emily. I'm sorry, but I left my purse. Don't bother, I think I know where it is. (*Comes over and gets it.*) Yes, here it is. I'm sorry I had to trouble you.

Miss Minnie. I'm glad you discovered you'd left it before you had gone far.

Mrs. Saunders (*standing a moment hesitating, and then speaking frankly*). Miss Minnie, I left my purse on purpose. I wanted to come back and tell you something I thought it was better for the others not to hear. It may not be anything, but Miss Minnie, when I stumbled on that brick this afternoon, I pushed it out of place, and underneath it I found this.

Miss Minnie (*surprised*). Why, what is it?

Mrs. Saunders. It's a letter.

Miss Minnie (*astonished*). A letter! Under the brick! I don't understand——

Mrs. Saunders. Mrs. Bostick and Miss Zilla had caught up with me just about the time I had discovered what it was, and while they were here I didn't have a chance to show it to you alone. I didn't understand, myself, and—well, sometimes I've found it better not to arouse people's curiosity.

Miss Minnie. Well, who's it addressed to?

Mrs. Saunders. There isn't any name, and from what it says—perhaps you had better read it yourself.

Miss Minnie (*looking about*). Where'd I put my glasses, Emily?

Miss Emily. I don't know, sister. (*Starts to look about for them.*)

Miss Minnie (*puzzled*). Never mind—I don't understand. You read it, read it aloud, Mrs. Saunders.

Mrs. Saunders (*reading*). "Sweetheart, I tried to meet you this morning on your way to school. I don't see how I missed

you, but I did. Important telegram has just come. I must leave to-night on the six o'clock train. You are coming with me. Yes, darling, I have it all planned. I have bought two tickets and am telephoning ahead for the license.

This old post-office is the surest way to get a message to you. It has served us so many times, and I knew you would look under the brick. Who cares for old ladies guarding telephones? Be at the station early, dearest. I shan't breathe again until you are with me."

MISS MINNIE (*changing from surprise into a steeled calm as she hears the letter.*) Why—it couldn't be for anyone in this house! Why there's some mistake, that's all.

MISS EMILY (*timidly*). Sister, maybe——

MISS MINNIE (*stoutly, sweeping away all possibility for speculation.*) There's nobody in this house that this letter could possibly concern. It belongs somewhere else.

MRS. SAUNDERS. Well, I didn't know, and——

MISS MINNIE. See if I didn't leave my glasses on that table, Emily. I'll have a look at it anyway, if you don't mind, though I know it's a mistake.

MISS EMILY. Here they are, sister.

(MISS MINNIE *puts them on and starts to look at the letter when* SUE *comes through the door. She hides the letter quickly behind her.*)

SUE. O, hello, Mrs. Saunders. I thought you'd gone—but I'm glad you haven't. I hope you didn't hurt your foot badly? Er—which brick was it? Aunt Minnie, don't you think I ought to find out, so I can fix it and no one——?

(MISS MINNIE *stares hard at her and* SUE *weakens under the gaze.*)

SUE. Well, if you don't want me to.

MISS MINNIE. You needn't bother! I'll look after the walk myself. You can finish taking those plates to the kitchen, though.

SUE (*a bit piqued*). Certainly, I only wanted to help. (*She picks up the remaining dishes and goes out.*)

MISS MINNIE (*to* EMILY). Emily, keep her outside. Don't let her come back.

MISS EMILY. Yes, Sister. (*She goes out.*)

(MISS MINNIE *and* MRS. SAUNDERS *stand alone for a moment in silence, then* MISS MINNIE *sits on the sofa, drawing* MRS. SAUNDERS *down beside her.*)

MISS MINNIE. Mrs. Saunders, you're a true Christian woman. I lied to you just now—because—because I'm a proud woman, and this (*she taps the letter*)—I needn't tell you, for you've already guessed the truth. But I don't know how to thank you for not telling the others this afternoon. . . . The ways of God are strange, Mrs. Saunders—you spraining your ankle on that brick may have saved——

MRS. SAUNDERS (*rising*). Don't try to explain it to me, Miss Minnie. I think I understand already all that's necessary for me to know, and I'm going to forget that when I go out of this house. I've lived long enough to learn how to forget sometimes, Miss Minnie. Don't come to the door with me, it isn't necessary. Good-night.

(*She hurries out quickly and draws the front door heavily closed behind her.* MISS MINNIE *does not change her position or speak until she is gone, but her eyes show her gratitude. When she is alone she rises, looking at the letter without really re-reading it, and then looks about for a place to hide it. She first chooses a book on the table and places it between its leaves, but as she walks away she changes her mind and finally hides it in a vase on the mantel. As she turns from hiding it,* MISS EMILY *enters and speaks a little hesitatingly as though she stood in awe of her sister.*)

MISS EMILY. I heard the front door close. She's gone?

MISS MINNIE. Where's Sue?

MISS EMILY. She's washing up the cups. What are you going to do about it, Minnie? It confirms what you've been suspecting, doesn't it? Where's the letter?

MISS MINNIE. I hid it.

MISS EMILY. What for?

MISS MINNIE. She mustn't see it.

Miss Emily. Where'd you hide it?

Miss Minnie. Inside that green vase.

Miss Emily. You're not going to say anything to her, then?

Miss Minnie. Not now. It says he's leaving town to-night. Later, maybe. We must keep her from knowing anything until he's gone.

Miss Emily (*awed at the prospect*). Do you think she would have gone with him if——?

Miss Minnie. I know she's not going with him. A Tremaine running away with an Oakes! Peddling knives at a fair for a living!

Miss Emily (*softly*). If she loves him——

Miss Minnie. Loves? Loves has nothing to do with it. How can she love one of those Oakes!

Miss Emily. But you remember when she was in high school, what happened when you——

Miss Minnie. When I took a firm hand? I'll take a firm hand again, and she'll live to thank me for saving her. Just as you have, Em' Tremaine, for saving *you*. What if I'd have let you go off and make a fool of yourself with Frank Ellis? There's worse things than being an old maid.

Miss Emily. Oh, I'm sure of it. I've never said I wasn't grateful to you, sister.

Miss Minnie. If Sue wants to marry, she can marry somebody that's in her own——

Miss Emily. Yes, sister. I hope she finds a nice man that will be good to her. (*As an afterthought.*) But how's she going to meet him in this town?

Miss Minnie. You and I have gotten on very well without meeting any man. It's common for all the women in a family to break their necks getting married. In almost every good family you'll find women who haven't married. You don't wish you'd married Frank Ellis, just to be married?

Miss Emily. Oh, I know you are right. You were right about me. (*Pause, and then softly.*) I didn't have the courage. (*Pause.*) Is the letter safe in that vase?

MISS MINNIE. For the present. I'll put it somewhere else later.

MISS EMILY. Well, what must we do now? How must we act, I mean?

MISS MINNIE. Why, act just as though we didn't suspect anything—as though nothing had happened. She mustn't suspect we know anything to-night. I'll go take that plate of ginger-bread over to Lizzie Conner. (*She goes out.*)

(MISS EMILY *turns on the light on the table, then walks over to the vase. Looks at it and timidly starts to take out the letter. Hearing someone, she stuffs it quickly back into the vase.* MISS MINNIE *comes through with a plate covered with a napkin.*)

MISS MINNIE. I told Sue to bring in the dust-pan. I noticed Ada Bostick spilled ginger-bread crumbs on the floor—over by that chair. Show her. I won't be gone long. (*She goes out the front door.*)

SUE (*entering with dust-pan*). Aunt Minnie doesn't need her glasses to see dirt.

MISS EMILY (*pointing*). Over by that arm-chair, Sue.

(SUE *brushes them up. There is a pause during which* MISS EMILY *seems restless. Finally she speaks.*)

MISS EMILY. Sue, is Carter Oakes in town?

SUE (*looking up quickly, on her guard*). Why, how should I know, Aunt Emily? (*Bats eyes.*) Aunt Minnie can probably tell you more about it than I can.

MISS EMILY. He's been back in town this summer?

SUE. Well, if he has, I'm not to——

MISS EMILY. You've seen him, haven't you?

SUE (*pleadingly*). Aunt Em'——

MISS EMILY. Tell me. It may be better——

SUE. Does Aunt Minnie—has she found out?

MISS EMILY (*looking out the window*). Your Aunt Minnie will be back in a minute. Don't waste any time. Sue, do you love him?

SUE (*a little defiantly, because she is not sure what* MISS EMILY *is driving at*). Yes. I love him. I've loved him ever

since I was in high school. Oh, Aunt Em', Aunt Minnie could make me stop seeing him, but she couldn't stop me thinking of him. She didn't stop what was inside of me. Yes, he's been back and I have been seeing him.

MISS EMILY. He still loves you?

SUE. Yes, he does. I know he does, and some day, Aunt Em', in spite of Aunt Minnie— (*breaking out.*) She hasn't the right—nobody has the right to make anybody else's life. Do you think so? (*Slight pause.*) Have they?

MISS EMILY. I'm not sure, Sue. You Aunt Minnie knows what's right and wrong so clearly—and I never could quite tell. (*A bit wistfully.*) It's hard on me sometimes. (*Quickly.*) She's a fine woman, Sue.

SUE. You know something. It's about Carter. What is it, Aunt Em'?

MISS EMILY (*a little frightened*). You mustn't get that idea, child.

SUE. Well, if Aunt Minnie goes trying to interfere with—I'm older now. She can't stop me as she did once. She can't bully me——

MISS EMILY. Bully you! Your Aunt Minnie! Sue, you forget about whom you are speaking. My sister ——

SUE. You're loyal to her, I know, in spite of the fact that she's always— (*breaking out suddenly*). Why did you mention Carter just now?

MISS EMILY. I don't know. I wish I hadn't— If you— (*with finality*). I'll not mention him again.

SUE (*losing her rebellious tone*). Aunt Em'?

MISS EMILY (*a guilty conscience making her slightly severe*). You'd better finish those crumbs now. (*Looking out the window.*) Someone's coming along the street. It looks like your Aunt Minnie. (*She continues to look out into the dusk as though she desired no further conversation.*)

SUE (*after surveying the dark form and then turning to the back of* MISS EMILY). Oh, if you only knew him, Aunt Em'. He's so fine!

MISS EMILY (*after a slight hesitation, turning round*). Who?

SUE. You know who I mean—Carter.

MISS EMILY (*gently*). I thought we'd agreed not to——?

SUE. *You* did, but—Oh, you don't know how splendid he is! You don't know what he's been through. Some day he's going to do great things.

MISS EMILY (*a little scarily*). It isn't likely the great things he's going to do will concern me—or you either.

SUE. Aunt Em', I'm not so sure. If I could only help him. If I thought it would help him to— (*She leaves the sentence unfinished, her romance written on her face.*)

MISS EMILY (*gently*). You'd what?

SUE. I'd do anything a woman can do. He's got so much, if only there's someone—the right one, to——

MISS EMILY. They say a woman can't do much to influence a man—not really. If he's going to drink himself to death, he'll go on—even if she marries him. And if he's going to do great things, I suppose he can do them without her, too.

SUE (*amazed*). You never talked to me like this.

MISS EMILY (*after a silent moment*). Have you courage, Sue? Have you courage to love him so that nothing matters?

SUE (*thoughtfully*). I think so. . . . What is it, Aunt Em'?

MISS EMILY (*softly*). I didn't have the courage once, that's all. (*Quickly*). If your Aunt Minnie knew what I'd been saying to you——

SUE. Something's happened. Has Carter——? (*Pleadingly.*) What is it? Please tell me. (*Short pause.*) Oh, tell me, Aunt Em'.

MISS EMILY (*hesitates, then speaks with a voice that has a new note of determination in it*). Carter's going away—tonight!

SUE (*struck with horror*). It isn't true . . . (*faltering*). How do you know?

MISS EMILY (*mustering all the firmness in her nature into her voice to go through with things. Pointing*). That vase.

SUE (*bewildered, going toward it*). Vase?

MISS EMILY. Yes. See what you find. (SUE *goes slowly over, takes it down and takes out the paper.*)

SUE (*holding it up questioningly*). This?

MISS EMILY. Yes, read it quickly. (*She unfolds it and starts in recognition.*)

SUE. Oh, Aunt Em'!

MISS EMILY (*as SUE reads it*). Mrs. Saunders found it under the brick this afternoon.

SUE (*rapturously*). Oh, it's all right! It's all right after all. I couldn't understand why I didn't hear! I walked up and down the streets an hour, hoping I'd meet him. I couldn't understand. (*Emphatically.*) I looked under that brick.

MISS EMILY. What are you going to do? He means to-night . . . doesn't he?

SUE. Yes.

MISS EMILY. Are you going with him?

SUE (*as though that settled it*). He says he wants me to come.

MISS EMILY. Have you got the courage to go like this—with your Aunt Minnie——?

SUE. Courage? He wants me to come. It doesn't take courage to do what he wants me to do. Aunt Em', you don't understand when you love somebody——

MISS EMILY (*softly*). Don't I, Sue? (*With apprehension.*) You'd better put back the letter in the vase. Your Aunt Minnie put it there. She'll be coming back.

SUE (*startled*). Does she know?

MISS EMILY. Not that I've told you. She mustn't suspect that. She'd never forgive me.

SUE (*rushing to her and throwing her arms about her*). Oh, I always, always did love you best!

MISS EMILY. Don't say that. You mustn't, Sue. It's because Minnie loves you—she wants—Minnie's a good woman and I—Maybe I'm a bad one. Are you going, Sue?

SUE. Of course I'm going, Aunt Em'.

MISS EMILY. Well, you haven't much time.

SUE. I'd better get things.

MISS EMILY. What about your school? You can't just go off like this——

SUE. Oh, that'll be fixed up. Gladys Knowles has been sub-

stituting for two years. I think she's been praying every night that something would happen to give her a regular place. (MISS EMILY *goes to the window.*) They need the money.

MISS EMILY (*suddenly*). There's your Aunt Minnie coming back. (*Pleased.*) Whatever happens, don't tell her I——

SUE. Oh, I know it, darling Aunt Em'. If she asks for me, say I've gone up-stairs to rinse out my blue blouse. (*She goes out.*)

(MISS EMILY *stands in the center of the floor a moment while* MISS MINNIE *enters.*)

MISS MINNIE. Well, Lizzie Conner is a hard one to please. She's complaining of too much company to-day. She didn't object to the ginger-bread, though. Whatever's the matter with Lizzie, her appetite is not afflicted. Where's Sue?

MISS EMILY (*evasively*). She said she was going up-stairs to rinse out her blue blouse.

MISS MINNIE (*spying dust-pan*). Pshaw, she's gone off and left the dust-pan lying right in the middle of the floor! Lot of good she did brushing up crumbs like that. She didn't get them all, either. (*She kneels down and begins to finish the job.*) She wouldn't know how to keep a home if she had one. I shan't ever give Ada Bostick ginger-bread in my house again if she's going to cut it like this. We can't leave those missionary dresses there.

MISS EMILY. I'll wrap them up and have them ready in the hall closet.

MISS MINNIE. Emily, that letter worries me. You're sure Sue's up-stairs?

MISS EMILY. She just went up, sister.

MISS MINNIE (*looking at the clock*). That train goes in forty minutes. She can't suspect. And, anyway, how do we *know* that letter is for her? Hand me my glasses. If he leaves town to-night—(*She takes down the letter and looks at it a minute.*) Emily, light that candle.

MISS EMILY. Candle?

MISS MINNIE. Yes, light it. It's better not to tempt Providence. I'll feel safer when I know——

(MISS EMILY *lights the candle and brings it to her. She sets the letter on fire and burns it in the tin holder.*)

MISS MINNIE (*as it burns, thoughtfully*). Providence takes strange ways, Emily. If Mrs. Saunders hadn't sprained her ankle, Sue might this minute——

MISS EMILY (*meekly*). Yes, sister.

MISS MINNIE. I'll wash these ashes down the sink. (*She blows out the candle and goes out, leaving* MISS EMILY *deep in her own thoughts.*)

(SUE *opens the door at the side cautiously, and comes around abruptly.*)

MISS EMILY. Oh, Sue! How'd you get ready so soon?

SUE. I thought it might happen. I had my bag all packed under my bed.

(*A long low whistle like some sort of a signal is heard from the street.* SUE *starts violently.*)

SUE. That's Carter. (*Picking up her bag.*) He's come to get me.

MISS MINNIE (*calling off-stage*). Emily . . . I forgot that dust-pan.

(MISS EMILY *and* SUE *look at one another frozen with horror for a moment.* SUE *starts to open the door to retreat, but fearing she will be caught abruptly, swings it open and using it as a screen, hides behind it so that she is not seen by* MISS MINNIE *who enters a few moments later from door in back.*)

MISS EMILY (*wildly, almost to herself, as* SUE *hides*). Oh, she's coming. Hide! Hide!

MISS MINNIE (*off-stage*). Oh, Emily, bring it here.

(MISS EMILY *picks up the dust-pan and tries to collect herself, looking back over her shoulder in an anomized way to make sure* SUE *can't be seen.*)

MISS MINNIE (*entering*). Why didn't you answer me? Who were you talking to?

MISS EMILY. I——

MISS MINNIE. I thought I heard voices.

MISS EMILY. Maybe you did—on the street.

(*The whistle is heard again, this time louder.*)

MISS MINNIE. What's that noise? (*She peers out the window.*)

MISS EMILY. Maybe it's one of the people you heard—on the street?

MISS MINNIE. Sounds like a signal. (*Suddenly suspicious.*) It might be——

MISS EMILY (*ready to collapse*). Oh, sister!

MISS MINNIE. Well, don't go to pieces. It probably isn't.

MISS EMILY (*getting back her courage*). No, it isn't likely. Didn't the letter say he'd meet her at the station?

MISS MINNIE. Yes, but it *would* be like an Oakes to stand outside somewhere whistling like a darkey, instead of coming to the front door.

MISS EMILY. He—tried the front door until you drove him——

MISS MINNIE. Sue can do without company, if it's that sort. It looks like she'd have more sense than to fall in love with——

MISS EMILY. You don't fall in love with your head.

MISS MINNIE (*irritated*). Well, you didn't, anyway.

MISS EMILY (*flinches as though cut, and for the rest of the scene is firmer and more determined—shortly*). No!

MISS MINNIE. I think we'd better call Sue down, in case——

MISS EMILY (*firmly*). I think we'd better not.

MISS MINNIE (*surprised at the tone*). What?

MISS EMILY (*waiving slightly*). She's up-stairs rinsing out that blouse. If you go calling her without any reason——

MISS MINNIE. Well—maybe

MISS EMILY. You empty this dust-pan. I'll finish with these dresses. Then we can talk about what's best——

(MISS MINNIE *takes pan and exits.* MISS EMILY *rushes to* SUE, *urging her across the room.*)

MISS EMILY. Come, while she's gone. She'll be back in a moment.

(*The two of them step just inside the room by the door to the front hall.*)

MISS EMILY. Do you know where you're going, Sue?

SUE. I'll write you . . . everything.

MISS EMILY. Maybe it's best I don't know. I'm not used to . . . to thwarting Minnie. Wait! (*She draws something out of the neck of her dress and hands it to* SUE.) Take this. You might need it.

SUE. Money? Keep it, darling Aunt Em', I won't.

MISS EMILY (*pressing it on her*). Please. (*She takes it. In sudden terror.*) Oh, go! Go! If Minnie should—I can't stand it any longer.

(SUE *goes out swiftly through the front hall.*)

(MISS EMILY *watches her disappear in highest suspense, looking through the window.*)

MISS MINNIE (*coming back*). Do you believe in the hand of the Lord, Em'?

MISS EMILY (*startled and utterly control of herself*). Why. . . . I'm not sure just what you mean, sister?

MISS MINNIE. I mean after this afternoon? Mrs. Saunders spraining her ankle— The Lord takes strange ways, but he *is* mindful of his own.

MISS EMILY (*fervently*). I hope so.

(*The whistle is again heard. This time as though farther away.*)

MISS MINNIE. Why, there's that whistle——

MISS EMILY. Yes, it's down the street. (*An answering whistle comes.*) Somebody answered it.

MISS MINNIE (*reassured*). Why, yes, that proves— We ought to be more trusting.

MISS EMILY. Yes, sister. I'll just get these missionary dresses put up.

CURTAIN

THE MAN WHO DIED AT TWELVE O'CLOCK

BY

PAUL GREEN

PAUL GREEN

Paul Green was born on a farm near Lillington, North Carolina, in 1894. He was graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1921, doing graduate work there and at Cornell during the next two years. He is at present editor of *The Reviewer*, and a member of the faculty of the University of North Carolina. He has written some twenty-five or thirty one-act plays, many of which have been published in magazines and various anthologies of plays.

Mr. Green has also written short stories for the magazines. His one-act play, *The No 'Count Boy*, was performed by the Dallas Little Theater, whose production of it won the David Belasco Cup in 1925.

Published plays: *The No 'Count Boy; White Dresses; The End of the Row; The Hot Iron; Old Wash Lucas; The Prayer Meeting; In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin; The Man Who Died at Twelve o'Clock; The Lord's Will; Blackbeard; The Old Man of Edenton; The Last of the Lowries; Fixin's.*

CHARACTERS

JANUARY EVANS, *a hard-drinking, superstitious old Negro*
SALLY EVANS, *his granddaughter*
CHARLIE MCFARLAND, *a farm-hand, in love with Sally*

SCENE: *Eastern North Carolina.*

TIME: *A few years ago.*

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THE MAN WHO DIED AT TWELVE O'CLOCK

The scene is a room in the Evans home. A door at the center back opens into a narrow hall. There are narrow windows at the right and left center. At the left of the rear door is a battered iron pot, and above it on a shelf, nailed to the rough joists, is a cheap clock. It is near the noon hour. At the right front is a fireplace. A few splint-bottomed chairs are about the room. At the left front is a washstand made of a pine goods-box and unpainted, partly covered with newspapers, on top of which are a pail of water and a gourd. A pair of dirty overalls, a shirt or two, and a ragged hat hang on nails in the joists at the right.

When the curtain rises, SALLY, *a plump, neatly dressed chocolate-colored girl is sitting in a chair near the center of the room sewing. She is singing as she sews.*

Fall o' de evening I go down de river,
Sailing in a boat so fine,
A-riding on de waters, waters,
Talking to dat love of mine.

A-weeping by de river, river,
Dere's where my true-love foun' me,
Call to me, kiss me, hug me,
Bofe of his arms aroun' me.

(*There is the sound of footsteps in the hall, and* CHARLIE MCFARLAND *stands in the doorway. He is a well-built, open-faced Negro of twenty or more.* SALLY *drops her sewing and stands up quickly, smiling at him brightly.*)

SALLY. I do declare, heah you is, Charlie boy, quicker'n I thought.

CHARLIE (*coming up to her and patting her shoulders affectionately, but with a gloomy abstraction*). Yeh, yeh, baby chile.

SALLY. Ain't you gwine kiss me?

CHARLIE. 'Scuse me, 'scuse me, sho' I is. (*He bends to kiss her and she throws her arms around him and hugs him tightly to her.*)

SALLY. Oh, me, me! Des' think of it, to-morrow we gwine be merried foh good!

CHARLIE (*forcing a smile*). Yeh, yeh.

SALLY. Take a seat and rest yose'f. (*He sits down and hangs his hat on his knee.*) You got through plowing soon, didn't you? (*She stands by him, her hand caressing lightly over his hair.*)

CHARLIE. Unh-hunh. I told Mr. Byrd 'bout you'n me helping out in de school-breaking to-night, and what wid de wedding and all he said I could quit at de finish of de upper piece.

SALLY. When he want you back?

CHARLIE. A-Tuesday. Dat'll give us Monday foh de picnic on de river. (*Hesitating.*) It would have ef—ef it all had come off de way we's planning.

SALLY. Come off? Sho' its coming off. And of a-Sundays we kin go to other places, way up to Fuquay, Summerville, no telling whah, traveling round too.

CHARLIE. Kin? How we gwine do dat?

SALLY. Dat's my susprise foh you, but I'll tell you dough. Listen, sugar, we gwine take part o' dat five hundered dollars and buy us'ns a little Fo'd. Den we kin burn de wind, round and about.

(*He shows little elation at the prospect.*)

CHARLIE. Ef us gits dat money, you means.

SALLY. Why you so doubtful all of a sudden? Ain't no *ifs* and *ands* in it.

CHARLIE. Mebbe so, lak as not adder all dey is.

SALLY (*anxiously*). What you so jubious 'bout mawning?

Grandpap ain't gwine hinder us. You been saying all de week dat he's a changed man adder dat vision two weeks ago.

CHARLIE. Yeh, yeh, I was a-thinking dat-a-way.

SALLY. And he has changed too. He won't go ag'in' his promise. I'm sho' o' dat now. Bofe of us thought 'twas all bluff at fust and e'en you got me into believing he was new bawn and now seems I got to 'suade you. Whut's de matter? Last night at de practice you was lak a lark, so happy and everything setting to our hand and Grandpap in a good humor wid you. (*With a sudden start.*) Lawd, you ain't gitting out'n de notion is you, and Arth gwine to Lillington foh de license dis evening?

CHARLIE (*vehemently*). Naw, naw, I tell you 'tain't dat.

SALLY. Well, whut is it, den? Is you gitting skeahed o' Grandpap ag'in? You know well's I do dat since de morning he heard de devil talking in de air and saying he's coming foh him some day at twelve o'clock, he's been lak a clean-washed lamb. He ain't cussed nary a word nor touched a drap o' liquor. And, Charlie hon, yistiddy he told me sweet as pie dat he done forgive you dat telling de sheriff 'bout his making liquor.

CHARLIE (*miserably*). Dat was yistiddy dough. He knowed long befo' dat 'twas de sheriff skeahed me into telling on him, fur as dat's concerned.

SALLY. And to-morrow foh de wedding present he's gwine turn over all dat money muh and pap left me. Now you hearten up if dat's whut ails you.

CHARLIE. Hey, he mought. But my mind tells me he'll keep executing on it des de way he has since dey died.

SALLY (*going back to her chair and picking up her sewing*). Cain't see why you worry. We three's gwine live on heah happy as you please. Look at dis devil's costyume you gwine to wear to-night in de play. Booh!

(*She suddenly whirls towards him, holding up a long red tight-fitting suit, horns, tail, and hoofs attached. Two terrifying eyes and a wide grinning mouth glare out at him.*)

CHARLIE (*starting back in alarm*). Lawd! Hyuh, hyuh, don't shake dat thing at me!

SALLY. Ho, ho, ho! I sho' has made a awful critter, ain't I?

CHARLIE (*coming up and touching it gingerly*). Lawd, Lawd, dat's a turble sight. Reckon 'twon't th'ow de folkses into fits when I comes stepping, crost de stage wid dat thing on?

SALLY (*sitting down with the garment in her lap and beginning to sew again*). I got to finish dis left-hand hawn; den you kin take it on wid you. I was gwine have it all done and complete foh you if you hadn't come early. Mought a-put it on and skeahed you wid it.

CHARLIE. Yeh, and I'd a-tore up de road gwine 'way from heah. Wouldn't had no devil in de dialogue to-night, been a-roosting in de swamp. (*He sits down forlornly and watches her sew.*) You's raght handy wid a needle, ain't you?

SALLY. I is dat. And, boy, I'se gwine make you mo' shirts and things dan a few. And knit! I kin knit, too. (*Jokingly.*) You better not think of th'owing me over heah at de last. Ain't many gals good at housekeeping lak me.

CHARLIE (*uneasily*). Hyuh, hyuh, don't talk lak dat. It hurts me worse'n it do you to think o' putting it off.

SALLY. Putting it off? We ain't gwine put it off.

CHARLIE (*wretchedly*). Don't seem no way out'n it.

SALLY. Way out'n whut?

CHARLIE. Everything's busted to pieces, dat's how.

SALLY. Is! How come?

CHARLIE. You don't know whah Uncle Jan is, do you?

SALLY (*with satisfaction*). Hunh, dat I do. In de bottom chopping his cawn. He's off dis mawning wid his hoe by sunrise. Needn't worry 'bout him.

CHARLIE (*bitterly*). In de bottom! He's in de bottom of a drunk, de old fool!

SALLY (*incredulously*). Hyuh, don't be trying to skeah *me* now.

CHARLIE. Trying! I wisht I had to try.

SALLY. [illegible] looking 'head. Tell me de truf.

CHARLIE. I'se telling you de truf. He mought a-gone off dis mawning wid a hoe, but when I come by Luke's sto' up de road few minutes ago dere he sot on a box wid a co'-cola bottle in his hand, beating and a-flamming and a-cussing at de wind.

SALLY (*with a wail*). O Lawd!

CHARLIE. When he seed me a-coming, he fell to lambanging and telling 'em all to let him make at me. Dey had to hold him back or I'd a-had to cave in his haid. Dere's yo' new-bawn lamb and follower of Jesus foh you. He's gut fed up on pizen liquor. He was so mad at me dat he 'gun to spit and spew all over de flo'. Said he's coming raght on home and shoot me full of holes if he found me heah. (*Wrathfully.*) Hurry and git dat last hawn fixed, I gut to be moving. Lawd, I won't feel lak cutting up no shines to-night.

SALLY (*her hands lying limp in her lap*). O Lawd, whut kin we do? (*A sob breaks in her voice.*) And heah we was wid everything fixed foh good.

CHARLIE. He 'bused me black and blue in de face. Said all I wanted was yo' money and dat I'd never git it. He had it hid whah nobody could find it and he's gwine let Luke have it to put in his sto'. (*Standing up from his chair and clenching his fist.*) Wisht to Gohd I had dat Luke Ligon heah in dis room, I'd frail him to deaf.

SALLY. We gut to do something, I tell you. Dat Luke git his claws on my money and dat's de end of it. (*They both sit thinking, wretched.*) When Grandpap comes cain't you'n me shet him up and make him give it up to us or tell us whah it is?

CHARLIE. Yeh, and dat man'll cut you all to pieces wid a knife. He's mean and he's full o' liquor. And 'sides you ain't twenty-one. Dey'd have de law on bofe of us. (SALLY *gets up and moves nervously around the room.*) Gimme dat costyume and lemme leave. Wisht to de good Gohd he'd a seed de devil dressed in dis suit in his vision, and I reckon he'd a-not been back in his weekedness so soon!

SALLY (*stopping in her walk*). Kin you see him coming? I gut a idee.

(CHARLIE *goes to the window and looks out.*)

CHARLIE (*excitedly*). Yeh, yeh, yonder he comes down de hill and walking all over de road. Gimme dat and lemme git away.

SALLY. Wait a speck. (*She wrinkles her brow in thought.*)

CHARLIE. Why foh?

SALLY. I believe I got a way to fix him.

CHARLIE. Hurry up. How you mean?

SALLY (*picking up the suit*). Skeah him, dat's how.

CHARLIE. Wid dat?

SALLY. Yeh, I b'lieves we kin do it.

CHARLIE. He mought shoot us.

SALLY. I'll hide his gun. (*She runs to the corner, takes the gun, unloads it, and throws it under the bed.*) Now gimme de shells. (*She gets a box of shells from the wash-stand, opens the window at the right and throws them out.*)

CHARLIE. Whut you mean to do?

SALLY (*growing excited*). Listen. Look at dat dere clock, neah 'bout twelve. Well, when twelve straks Grandpap is gwine die.

CHARLIE. Die? We—we ain't gwine kill him, is we? Naw suh, I ain't—Sally you, —

SALLY. I hopes we won't kill him, but he's gwine think his time's come.

CHARLIE (*turning quickly back to the window*). Oh—— Hurry up wid yo' plans den, yonder he is now down by de branch place.

SALLY (*breathlessly*). It des flashed on me lak a streak. It's dis. He had de vision dat he's gwine die some day at twelve when de devil comes foh him. Dat's whut de devil told him. Well, when he comes in heah to lie down and sleep off his drunk I's gwine set up a monstrous heap o' wailing and screeching sorter lak I has to do in de dialogue, 'cepting worse. You be dat up in de entry dressed in dis heah suit. I'll skeah him to deaf wid my talk 'bout signs and sich, and

den when de clock straks twelve you come in to git him. Lawd, he'll git religion dis day, see'f he don't.

CHARLIE. How you know we kin do all dat? He might git something and brain me wid it, I tells you.

SALLY. Dat he won't. He's gwine be skeahed worse'n he's ever been. And he'll cough up dat money, and tell all his sins, and 'fo' he's got straight ag'in, we'll be all fixed. And he ain't never gwine know it wa'n't de devil adder him. Boy, we'll sho' have all de under-holt yit.

CHARLIE (*staring at her*). Lawd, Lawd, you's de sharpest gal I ever did see in dis world.

SALLY. Dis heah's de time to be sharp if we's gwine git merried to-morrow. Now, hyuh. When you come in wid yo' devil's suit on, you talk to him, ax him all sorts of question. He'll tell everything. (*Bubbling over with excitement.*) Yeh, yeh, we gut him whah we want him at last. And I'll make out all de time dat I cain't see devil or nothing. (*Coming up to him and hugging him in courageous ecstacy.*) We gwine have some fun out'n him. Adder to-day I bet my hat he'll be a shouting Christian.

CHARLIE (*warming to the game*). All raght, honey, dis heah's de time. I'll stick to you. And talk 'bout cutting a rust at dat schoolhouse? I's gwine make a to-do wid dat old man whut is one!

SALLY. Now you slip in de entry and shet de do' and doll up. We gwine have a sober man on our hands in a few minutes. Hurry, hurry, dere he is coming by de woodpile.

(*She pushes the costume into his hand and hurries him out at the rear and quickly picks up the loose scraps of her sewing and hides them under the mattress; after which she sits down in her chair and bows her head in her hands. Old* JANUARY *is heard singing outside, and his white head dodders by the window. In a moment he is heard grunting and stumbling in the hall. He creeps in at the rear and stands clinging to the door-facing with long, skinny hands. He is just drunk enough to be quarrelsome and fearful. He is dressed in an old shirt, open at the front, and a pair of over-*

alls too short for him, below which stick out his enormous black, horny feet. His hat is gone, and his hair flares up in a white tangle around his shrunken ebony face. As he comes in, he looks at SALLY *and carries on his song.*)

UNCLE JANUARY.

I tells you onct—I—tells you—twice,
Niggers in hell foh shooting dice—
Pharyoh's army got drownded,
Oh, Mary don't you weep.

(*Waving his hand gaily.*) Heah I is, drunk and r'aring to go! (SALLY *pays no attention to him. Staggering forward, he sits down on the cot and moves his head around in a circle, mouthing and letting out deep groans. He stops and stares at* SALLY.) Hyuh, you! Is dat you, Sally? Whah's dat dog of a Charlie? (*Making an effort to get to his feet.*) Unh—hunh, I knows. (*His head swaying in drowsiness.*) I—know, I's gwine shoot his lights out. Dat's whut I come foh.

SALLY (*looking at him sadly*). He ain't heah, he's gone.

UNCLE JANUARY. Anh-hah, bedder be. Dat rascal want my money. Ain't gwine git it, nunh—unh. (*He falls back on the bed and stretches himself out.*) Tell him if he's heah when I git over my good time I's coming foh him wid a gun. —I's a-coming foh— (*His voice trails off. He lays his head back with a great sigh and closes his eyes.*)

SALLY. Don't you lay down lak dat. Wake up, wake up!

UNCLE JANUARY (*mumbling*). Shet up dat racket, shet up and let a' old man sleep—sleep—whut needs it. (*He begins puffing away and snoring.*)

SALLY (*creeping up to the cot*). Grandpap, grandpap, git up, dey's a turble time coming on you!

UNCLE JANUARY (*dreamily and slapping at her*). Git—t o-o-ff —o—off. (*He falls to snoring regularly.*)

SALLY (*talking to herself*). Whut I gwine do? Hyuh, hyuh, I gut to git him outen dat liquor. (*She looks apprehensively at the clock, which lacks twenty-five minutes till twelve.*) Bedder fix dat clock 'bout right to suit me. (*She*

goes to the clock and moves it up ten minutes.) Reckon dat'll give me egzactly time enough. (UNCLE JANUARY *is puffing steadily away, at every third or fourth breath making a sort of whistling sound through his lips. She stands watching him closely, thinking.*) Now I gits ready to sail on him. (*She goes over to a broom in the corner and gets a long straw, comes back to the cot, and begins to tickle his nose.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*in a faraway voice, smacking his lips.*) Lemme 'lone. Uh—m—uh—m.

(*She tickles his nose again, and he falls to sneezing, his grizzled head and calloused feet being jerked violently upward with each movement of his diaphragm. Every convulsion is followed by a combined wheeze and shout.*)

SALLY (*angrily*). Ain't he a sight on earf! I'll wake him yit. (*She bends down and begins blowing a heavy blast in his nostrils. He rears and backs and beats the air as if fighting flies. Then as she blows a heavier blast than ever, he begins champing like a horse and suddenly spits in her face. She starts back with a smothered exclamation of wrath.*) You nasty, stinking rascal, you done spet raght kuh-dab on me! (*She wipes her face and tweaks him by the nose, calling loudly.*) Grandpap, Grandpap!

(*As he groans and crawls up to a crouching position in bed, she slumps down in her chair and begins sobbing in seemingly heartbroken grief. Presently he slides his thin legs out on the floor and sits on the edge of the bed, holding his head in his hand.*)

UNCLE JANUARY. Who dat hollering me so? Lawd, I's perished foh water. Cain't sleep, cain't rest. (*He blinks uncomprehendingly around him. Slapping his forehead with his hand, he quavers childishly.*) Oh, my haid hurt! (*He gets to his feet and makes his way across the room to the bucket.* SALLY *carries on her moaning and rocking, watching him out of the corner of her eye as he drinks several gourdfuls of water and gives his head a drenching.*)

SALLY (*with a sudden shriek*). O Lawd have mercy on us!

UNCLE JANUARY (*turning and staring at her in amazement*). Who dat! Heigh! Whut de name o' Gohd ails you!

SALLY. Oh, don't go away and leave us, don't you go!

UNCLE JANUARY. Hyuh, hyuh! Whoever dat is cutting up so, you stop it. (*Shouting at her.*) Sally, you git de linimint and rub my haid. Lawd, why you r'aring so? (*He starts towards the cot, smacking his lips and stretching his toothless mouth in great gapes.*)

SALLY (*in a storm of grief*). Too late foh liniment, too late. (*Moaning.*) Nothing kin help you now to flee from de wraf to come. Gohd done sent his sign!

UNCLE JANUARY (*sitting on the edge of the cot, twisting his head, and spitting on the floor.*) Whut sign? Tell me whut ails you, I says. Is somebody daid? Oh, my po' haid!

SALLY. Not yit, not yit, but when dat dere clock straks twelve somebody's gwine be.

UNCLE JANUARY. Is? You say somebody gwine die? (*Jerking his head up.*) Gohd a'mighty, who is it, chile!

SALLY. Don't you use de Lawd's name dat-a-way, don't you do it! And you des' ten minutes from gwine to the t'other world. O Lawd, have mercy on dis sinful man! (*She buries her face in her apron.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*belching lugubriously*). Hunh, whut t'other world? What sinful man is dat?

SALLY. It's so, Grandpap, it's so. Yo' vision's gwine happen.

UNCLE JANUARY (*blinking at her*). Whut vision?

SALLY. You know whut vision. And when dat clock straks twelve you'll be daid as a nit. It's seed signs, plenty o' signs.

UNCLE JANUARY (*sitting up straight*). Whut signs? Whut signs? Tell me dat. Hyuh, hyuh, set up and speak fo'th. (*He watches her anxiously, his drunkenness clearing.*)

SALLY (*turning in agony on him*). Pray, pray, 'fo' it's too late. Lawdy, O Master, make him to see his danger! (*She rocks back and forth.*)

UNCLE JANUARY. Shet yo' mouf, dry up, I tells you. I ain't gwine die ner nothing, oo-h—ooh!

SALLY. Oh, yeh you is, yeh you is. Lemme tell you de signs I seed and you'll pray den all raght, but I feah it'll be too late —too late.

UNCLE JANUARY (*swaying from side to side and beginning to look uneasily about the room*). Signs! Tell me whut signs, I axes you.

SALLY. Ev'y since nine o'clock dis mawning till few minutes ago dat old dominicker hen been crowing. And she ain't crowed none since dat day last spring Mis' Penny died.

UNCLE JANUARY (*fear creeping into his voice*). Air you sho' 'twas de old dominicker, Sally?

SALLY. Sho'? Dat I is sho'. And dat ain't all, dat ain't de hunderth part. All de whole o' last night de deaf bells been a-ringing in my haid, rung so I couldn't sleep.

UNCLE JANUARY (*growing more and more sober, patting his foot nervously against the floor*). Mebbe dat don't mean me, sho' it don't mean me.

SALLY (*shaking her head sadly, and wiping the tears from her eyes*). Cain't be nobody else, cain't be, and you done had a vision 'bout it. And listen to dis—listen now to de turble warning. Early in de pink o' de mawning I was out in de gyarden and heahd de hell-hounds crossing de sky.

UNCLE JANUARY (*horror-stricken*). Lawd-a-muhcy, did you? (*He locks his arms around one knee and stares at her with wide eyes.*)

SALLY. I did dat. Thought den I wouldn't tell you, but now you come home drunk I gut to do all I kin to save you. (*Twisting her hands together and lifting up her eyes.*) O Lawd up dere in Heaben, help save him 'fo' de devil come foh his soul.

UNCLE JANUARY (*stretching his hand towards her in supplication*). Sally, Sally, don't you squall lak dat.

SALLY. And when dem hounds passed over dis heah house dey des, swooped down and moaned and howled louder'n ever. Den dey passed out'n heahing 'crost de creek.

(UNCLE JANUARY *snaps his head around and looks at the clock which now lacks five till twelve. With a groan he*

slumps down on the cot. SALLY *continues her moaning and praying. Presently he raises his head and gapes feebly.*)

UNCLE JANUARY. Was dey—was dey any mo' signs, Sally? Quick, quick, tell me all you seed.

SALLY (*shivering and crouching down in her chair*). Oh, but I cain't tell you de last and mos' awfullest one of all, I cain't—(*sobbing loudly.*) I cain't tell you!

UNCLE JANUARY (*putting his hand weakly to his heart and gasping for breath.*) Whut was it? Lemme know—know de wust.

(*She waits, without replying. He stares at the clock, his tongue lolling in his mouth. When it is preparatory to striking, she turns wildly upon him and shouts.*)

SALLY. I was out dere at de pig-pen feeding de pigs raght adder you went to de bottom, and I seed a devil's hole by a pine stump, and I bent down and listened—and whut did I heah, oh, whut did I heah? I heahd wailing and grinding and hosses neighing way down dere in hell. And dey was loud screaming and wild laughing and rattling o' chains, and I could see a great far roaring. Den de fuss stopped, and I heahd two voices talking, and one of 'em—one of 'em. . . . (*She suddenly stops and bursts into loud sobs again.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*his eyes bright with terror*). Whut did dey say? Whut did dey say?

SALLY. One of 'em said de devil was a-coming foh you to-day at twelve o'clock. (*Screaming.*) And it's twelve raght dis minute. Pray! Pray! (*She springs out of her chair and rushes wildly from the room.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*falling on his knees by the cot and crying out in a high, slobbering voice*). Gohd ha' muhcy, Gohd ha' muhcy! (*The clock begins to strike. He backs across the room from it, watching it as if hypnotized.*) Dere you go—dere you go hurrying off de pass of time! (*He wags his finger and almost chants in the extremity of his fear.*) One—two—th'ee—fo'—five—ha'f gone—ha'f gone—six—seven—and eight—and nine—now it's ten—'leven—de last one—twelve! (*He stands closing and unclosing his hands in*

stupefaction, shivering as if with an ague. He waits, swaying with weakness, but nothing happens. The clock goes on ticking merrily. He opens his eyes and stares around, slaps his body, listens, then cackles hysterically.) Glory—glory to Gohd, it's all a mistake! I's safe—safe as a dollar—hooray! (*As he starts towards the door, it opens and the devil, horned, tailed and hoofed, slides in. With a squeak* UNCLE JANUARY *falls like a log on the bed and lies looking at the approaching horror with piteous eyes. A moaning sound comes through his lips and he clutches blindly at his throat. A whine that gradually rises into words bursts from him.*) Ha' muhcy! Ha' muhcy! A speck o' time. Gimme one minnit—one.

(*The* DEVIL *comes nearer and stares down at him.*)

DEVIL (*in a hollow voice*). January Evans, two weeks ago you was give warning 'bout yo' wicked life, but you wouldn't heed it, and you went a-tempting Gohd ag'in to-day. Now it's too late—too late—yo' time's up. Yo' soul belongs to me and to-night I roasts you in hell!

UNCLE JANUARY. Ha' muhcy! Ha' muhcy! (*Great drops of perspiration cling to his brow.*)

DEVIL (*thundering*). Muhcy! Gohd A'mighty's offered you muhcy seventy long yeah and you kept a-spetting in his blessed face.

(SALLY *comes in weeping.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*crying out as he spies her*). He'p, he'p, Sally! Come heah, come heah and git him off.

DEVIL. And dey shall call foh muhcy and dey'll be no muhcy.

SALLY (*looking down at him in great sorrow*). Ain't you gone yit, Grandpap?

UNCLE JANUARY (*pleadingly*). Git de gun and shoot him, Sally! (*He makes a feeble effort to rise, but falls back, gasping for breath, wailing.*) Shoot him, run him out'n dis room!

SALLY (*looking around*). Who? Run who out?

UNCLE JANUARY (*his jaw dropping down like a dead man's*). Cain't you see nobody heah in de room?

(*The* DEVIL *folds his arms and waits.*)

SALLY. Dey ain't nobody but you'n me. (*She bends quickly over him, her breath caught with fear.*) Is you seeing something, grandpap? Is you?

UNCLE JANUARY (*pointing weakly*). Dere, dere! It's de devil! (*Screaming.*) See him dere grinning at me!

SALLY (*starting back with a sharp moan*). Oh, Lawd, he's gwine out, he's gitting to de River Jordan. Don't let his soul be lost! (*She drops in her chair and rocks back and forth.*) Ain't no hope now and de devil done come foh him.

(*The* DEVIL *takes another step toward his victim.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*putting out his hands to ward him off*). Somebody come he'p a po' old man. Come heah, folkses! He'p! He'p! (*He begins to whimper.*)

DEVIL. Make yo'se'f ready to go. 'Fess yo' sins. Beg fohgiveness.

UNCLE JANUARY. Cain't you heah dat talking now, Sally? (*Pleading.*) Cain't you heah nothing?

SALLY. I don't heah nothing. Whut's he saying to you? Oh, he's gitting neah de gates of de other world!

UNCLE JANUARY. He tells me to—to—'fess my sins. Yeh, yeh, I 'fesses and axes fohgiveness. Oh, Lawd wipe 'em off'n dat Book.

DEVIL. Own up, own up all yo' meanness and it'll be easier on you in dat pit.

UNCLE JANUARY (*in a small voice, speaking as if in a dream*). I been a turble man all de days of my life. I's sorry foh it all.

DEVIL. Dat makes it easier den. Whut you been doing mean lately?

UNCLE JANUARY. Yeh, I'll tell it all. I'll tell. Me'n Luke's gut us a new still at de head of de pond—put it in yistiddy. Fohgive me foh dat—foh dat. (*His voice grows weaker.*)

DEVIL. What else? Speak, man, yo' time is short.

UNCLE JANUARY. (*In a faraway voice.*) Cain't 'member—no' more—dat's all—all.

DEVIL. Dat ain't all. Don't you try to fool wid de sperits of

de other world. How 'bout dat money b'longs to de gal name' Sally?

UNCLE JANUARY. Yeh, yeh, dere—dere behime a brick up inside de farplace—all dere—give it to her. Dat was a sin, I knows now. (*His voice coming back stronger.*) Yeh, yeh, and Charlie—I wants her to marry Charlie, dat was a big sin. I sees it now. (*Panting.*) Lemme live to make it all right—gimme des' a day.

DEVIL. You swear to turn all her money over to her and let her marry Charlie.

UNCLE JANUARY (*eagerly*). Yeh, I swears—I'll git de license—anything. (*He closes his eyes and beats on his breast for breath. He goes on in a weakening voice.*) And I'll never drink anudder drap—nary—un. Growing dark heah—whah is you, Sally? (*He feels around him on the bed.*) Sally, Sally!

DEVIL. Den if you swears—(*He stops and peers at* UNCLE JANUARY *who lies limp and still. In alarm.*) Whut's de matter wid you, Uncle—whut's happened, January Evans? (UNCLE JANUARY *makes no reply.* CHARLIE'S *voice alarms* SALLY *and she hurries to the bed.*)

SALLY. Whut you done, Charlie? Whut——

CHARLIE (*bending over him, fearfully*). Dey's something bad happened.

SALLY. Oh, me! (*Calling loudly.*) Grandpap! Grandpap! (*He makes no answer and she shakes him vigorously.*) Wake up! (*She falls to rubbing his hands feverishly.*) We got to do something raght quick. Lawd, s'pose'n he dies or something. Rub his feet, quick, his hands is cold! (CHARLIE *begins rubbing his feet.* SALLY'S *voice rises high in fear as she rubs faster and faster.*) Tell me, whut kin we do? Kin we git a doctor or somebody?

CHARLIE. I don't know—rub him, roll him. (*They both roll him back and forth across the bed.*) Feel his heart.

SALLY. Cain't tell wh'ah it's beating or not. Run, git de bucket o' water and le's put some on him. (CHARLIE *brings*

the bucket in a rush, hesitates a moment, and then dashes the contents full in the old man's face.)

CHARLIE. Dat'll bring him if anything will.

SALLY. You'll drown him. Why we ever want to do dat foolishness nohow? (UNCLE JANUARY *begins to sputter and cough.* SALLY *cries out joyously.*) Thank Gohd, he's coming back! Hyuh, you run git dem clothes off'n you. Th'ow him into fits he see you. Git! (CHARLIE *runs out at the rear.*) Grandpap! Grandpap! (*He opens his eyes and gazes at her. She bends down and kisses him on the forehead, her shoulders shaking with grief. Presently she controls herself.*) You ain't daid, is you Grandpap? Oh, you's alive! Thank de Lawd!

UNCLE JANUARY (*raising himself up with difficulty on his elbow*). Whah is I? (*His voice is humble and sweet. Suddenly he looks around terror-stricken.*) Whah dat devil?

SALLY (*impetuously*). Grandpap, we— (*She catches herself in time and stands waiting, laughing and almost weeping at once.*) Dey ain't no devil, and you's safe in yo' own bed.

UNCLE JANUARY (*finally working himself into a sitting position*). Dey *was* a devil, and I was a praying foh help. (*He turns excitedly to* SALLY.) Think of it, chile, I been *daid;* dat's what I has——

SALLY. Daid? We thought you was and poured water on trying to save you.

UNCLE JANUARY. And I been daid. De devil come and got me—raght dere he stood plain as de pa'm o' yo' hand—in de middle o' de flo'. And when I done promised everything, he took me off in de dark, sailing, sailing, and finally we come back where it was light. Den I woke, and heah I is. (*He puts his feet out on the floor.*) Honey, I done been treating you wrong, dat devil made me own up. Yo' money's in de farplace dere. Every cent but a few dollars I borrowed, and I's gwine go raght off and git 'nough to pay you back.

SALLY (*laughing hysterically and twisting her hands*). Dat's all raght 'bout a few dollars and I don't keer foh nothing

since you's back wid us. (*Overcome with excitement, she sits down and stares at him.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*beating his thigh with his skinny hand and blinking before him.*) Des' think of it, chile, I was r'ally daid, I b'lieve—in fact I know I was. Dat vision was eve'y bit so, and all dem signs you seed. Couldn't be no mistook 'bout dat devil, he come foh me. (*Shaking his head.*) Dunno dough des' how I gut back heah. (*He sits lost in wonder.*)

SALLY. I believes you was daid too, foh a while—couldn't feel no heart-beat, no nothing.

UNCLE JANUARY. No *b'lieve* 'bout it—sho I was plumb gone to de udder world. (*His voice falling into humility.*) Ol' Master been good to me, too good, Sally, and I's gwine try to serve him de rest of my days. (*He begins to whimper.*)

SALLY. Don't cry now.

UNCLE JANUARY. He gin me des' dis one chanct to come back—dat devil said he mought gimme anudder trile. Reckon you could git holt of Charlie? I wants him to know I's—I's willing foh you and him—willing and happy raght down to de bottom.

SALLY. He come 'bout de time you was tuk wid yo' spell. He's outside now.

UNCLE JANUARY. Is? (*He stands up.*)

SALLY. Yeh, I'll call him. (*She goes to the door.*) Charlie! Charlie! (*He comes in, buttoning up his shirt.*)

UNCLE JANUARY (*clinging to him*). I des' had de greatest 'sperience to martal man a few minnits back. I died stone daid.

CHARLIE (*gently getting loose from him*). Aw, you don't mean daid?

UNCLE JANUARY (*almost defensively now*). Daid eve'y bit and grain. And I's come back foh anudder chanct. You ain't gwine never be bodd'red wid me no mo'. I makes frien's wid you now to de judgment day.

CHARLIE (*somewhat remorseful*). Lawd, Uncle Jan, you's too good to us all of a suddent.

UNCLE JANUARY. Naw suh. (*He stops suddenly and a light breaks over his face. He whispers to himself.*) Daid, daid as a do' nail, and now heah I is. (*In loud exultation.*) Dere was dem men in de Bible, and now dey's me. (*He hitches up his suspenders and throws his hands out wide.*) Git behime me, folkses, git behime! (*He scrambles out at the rear, calling joyously.*) Ay, you Luke! I's gut a mess to tell you!

(*Wondering, they watch him go, and then their eyes turn towards the fireplace.*)

CURTAIN

A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE

BY

MARTIN FLAVIN

MARTIN FLAVIN

Martin Flavin was born at San Francisco in 1883. After his graduation from the University of Chicago in 1907 he wrote short stories for the magazines and then entered the business world. Until very recently he devoted all his time to business, and then after the production of his successful play, *Children of the Moon,* he wrote a number of other plays, long and short.

Published plays: *Children of the Moon; Caleb Stone's Death Watch; A Question of Principle; Lady of the Rose; Brains; Casualties; An Emergency Case;* and *The Blind Man.*

CHARACTERS

A Man
A Banker
A Clergyman
A Judge
A Communist
A Policeman
A Girl

Scene: *A street in a large city.*

Time: *The present.*

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A QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE

A street in a large city.

A broad sidewalk fronting the windowless stone wall of a large building. In the center at the base of the wall is an excavation about four feet square and four feet deep. Several stone blocks have been removed from the building and piled on either side of the pit. There are piles of loose dirt against the wall, and a small pile in front of the pit. Resting on this pile is a queer-looking, shiny brass cylinder about eighteen inches long and four inches in diameter. It bears this inscription, in neat white letters: "B. B. No. 10 Guaranteed."

A pleasant-faced young fellow—the MAN—*in workman's clothes is digging in the pit. He has honest, gentle eyes, modest and affable manners, and a soft and very pleasing voice. He is humming cheerfully to himself as he digs.*

The BANKER *hurries down the street. He is a tall, slender, gray-haired, severe-looking man, immaculately dressed in cutaway and silk hat, and he carries a stick. As he is passing the excavation, some dirt is thrown out of it and falls upon his shoes. He stops, stamps the dirt from his shoes, and looks at them ruefully.*

BANKER (*muttering to himself*). Stupid idiot!—Most annoying!—Disgusting!

(*The* MAN *stops digging and, leaning against the wall, regards the* BANKER *with an expression of mild concern.*)

MAN. I'm very sorry.

BANKER (*dusting his shoes with his handkerchief*). Humph! I daresay.

MAN. I don't think it will hurt them. It's only dirt.

BANKER. Humph! (*He straightens up and glares at the* MAN.) What are you doing in there?

MAN. Digging.

BANKER. Digging! Yes, of course, I see that; but what are you digging?

MAN (*without a trace of impudence*). A hole.

BANKER. Certainly, a hole; but for what? Gas, water, sewer, what?

MAN. For a bomb. (*He pronounces it "bum."*)

BANKER. A what?

MAN. A bomb.—You know, dynamite.

BANKER. Oh, I see! You're blasting. That's it, isn't it?

MAN. Y-e-s, I guess you might call it that.

BANKER. My interest in your occupation is not unreasonable; you see, the bank in this building and the building itself belong to me. I own them.

MAN. Ah, that's too bad! I'm sorry.

BANKER. I beg your pardon.

MAN. I said I was sorry.

BANKER. Oh!

(*There is an uncomfortable pause. The* MAN *resumes his work, and the* BANKER, *a little out of countenance, turns away. As he does so he becomes aware of the brass cylinder at his feet. He pokes it inquiringly with his stick.*)

MAN. I wouldn't do that if I were you.

BANKER (*drawing back a step*). No?

MAN. They're very delicate things, very sensitive. When you understand them you can do almost anything with them; but if you haven't had experience—— (*He shakes his head solemnly.*)

BANKER. What is it?

MAN (*picking up the cylinder and stroking it fondly*). Why, this is the bomb.

BANKER (*doubtfully*). Oh!

MAN. If you never saw one before, I should be glad to explain it to you.

BANKER. Um—thanks—— It's very good of you. (*He sits down on a block of stone at the edge of the pit.*)

MAN. Not at all. You see, this end contains a little clock, and this is the knob you wind it up with. Now this dial underneath looks like a clock, but its hands don't run. You have to set them. You set them for any hour you like; for example, nine o'clock, see? And when the real clock gets around to that time, why—bang she goes, see?

BANKER (*nodding a trifle blankly*). Ah!—Um, to be sure.

MAN. It's very simple.

BANKER. Very.

MAN. And such beautiful workmanship.

BANKER (*running his hand over the bomb*). Exquisite.

MAN (*proudly*). It's the best bomb made.

BANKER. Indeed? Tell me, where do you get them?

MAN. They are manufactured by a big concern out of town, but you can get them by parcel post or in almost any department store.

BANKER. Convenient.

MAN. Yes, but of course you have to be careful. There are so many brands on the market, and the dishonest retailers try to sell the cheap substitutes when they can. You can never be sure you are getting the real thing unless you see this trademark. (*He points to the letters on the bomb.*) That's the only guarantee of quality.

BANKER. I see. And those letters, what do they signify?

MAN. Oh, those? Well, B. B. is the trade name: Bolshevik Bomb.

BANKER (*essaying rather feeble laughter*). Ha-ha! That's rather good, isn't it?

MAN. Yes, isn't it? You see, this particular bomb was invented by a Russian who did a lot of work for the Germans during the war, and afterwards he went back to Russia, but the bomb business is no good there now, so he came over here. He's been doing splendidly here.

BANKER. Hm!—And the number?

MAN. Oh, yes, the number: that indicates the strength. Num-

ber one is, of course, the smallest. It has no professional standing. One of those things that women use in clothes-line disputes. More noise than damage.

BANKER (*nodding blankly*). Hm!

MAN. Number two is a little larger and more powerful. It's mostly intended for safe-blowers.

BANKER (*horrified*). Safe-blowers!

MAN. Of course, I don't use that size myself. I use eights and nines and tens; but they go up to thirty-seven, which is five times as big as this. They don't carry a stock of the big ones. You have to have them made to order.

BANKER. Ah!—And this one is—er——

MAN. A good, average, everyday, practical bomb. Not fancy, but clean-cut and reliable. I've used hundreds of them, and I've never had——

BANKER (*interrupting anxiously*). I mean—er—about its strength.

MAN. Oh, you don't need to worry about that! No, sir, not a bit. Why, when this little engine cuts loose, I'd be willing to promise you—— (*He looks appraisingly at the wall of the building.*) Yes, sir, I'd be willing to bet—— (*He indulges in a little mental calculation.*)

BANKER (*nervously*). Y-e-s?

MAN. I'll stake my reputation on it. When this little bomb has done its work there won't be one stone left on top of another.

BANKER (*leaping to his feet*). *What?*

MAN (*proudly*). I'll guarantee it.

BANKER (*aghast*). But this is my building!

MAN (*sympathetically*). Yes, I know. You told me.

BANKER. It cost a million dollars.

MAN. Did it really? (*He shakes his head sadly.*)

BANKER. But look here! I mean to say—— Oh, pshaw! You can't be serious about this. It's—it's ridiculous.

MAN. I appreciate your point of view. I'm very sorry.

BANKER. But why should you destroy *my* building? What

have I ever done to you? Why, good Lord, man, I never saw you before!

MAN. I assure you, I haven't the slightest personal feeling about it.

BANKER (*wildly*). Then why——

MAN (*gravely*). It's a question of principle.

BANKER. A question of what?

MAN. A question of principle.

BANKER. But I don't understand. I——

MAN (*gently and patiently*). Everyone has principles. Soldiers have them. They kill each other, but there isn't anything personal about it. It's simply a question of principle. Governments have them—even kings have them. There isn't a man so high or so low, so rich or so poor, but what he's got principles. Why, you've got them, yourself, haven't you?

BANKER. Yes, but——

MAN. I thought so. You see, it's universal. And the first duty of every man is to live up to his principles. You can't deny that, can you?

BANKER. No, certainly, but——

MAN. Well, there you are. (*He picks up his shovel and resumes his work.*)

BANKER (*mumbling crazily to himself*). Am I mad? Is he mad? Are we both mad? This is positive bedlam.

MAN (*in a muffled chant*). Principle: the first duty of man. The first duty of man: principle. No matter how you say it, it comes to the same thing. Principle: the first duty of man. The first duty of man: principle.

BANKER (*shouting into the pit*). But stop a moment! Look here! (*The* MAN *stops digging.*) There are good principles and bad principles, aren't there?

MAN. No. All principles are good, otherwise how could they be the first duty of man?

BANKER. But they aren't.

MAN. Oh, yes, they are! Why, you just said so yourself.

BANKER. I didn't. I said—I meant—— Well, anyway, I

won't argue about it. It's too absurd. (*Frigidly.*) But perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me what particular principle you've got that requires the destruction of my property?

MAN (*after a reflective pause*). I'm sorry, but that is a matter I would prefer not to discuss. (*He resumes his work.*)

BANKER (*raving*). The whole thing is incredible—simply incred—— (*He perceives the* CLERGYMAN *approaching and rushes toward him with outstretched arms.*) Doctor! Doctor!

(*The* CLERGYMAN *is a fussy little man in the garb of an Episcopal rector. He has a timid manner and a slight impediment in his speech. And he is carrying a prayerbook. He greets the* BANKER *with pleasure and proper deference.*)

CLERGYMAN. My dear sir, how delightful!

BANKER. There's a man over there with a bomb.

CLERGYMAN. Dear me, you don't say so?

BANKER. I do say so. (*He leads him to the edge of the pit.*) Look! There is the man, and there is the bomb.

CLERGYMAN (*edging discreetly away from the bomb*). Extraordinary! Most extraordinary!

BANKER. I agree with you. Nevertheless, you can see for yourself; that man is preparing to blow up my building.

CLERGYMAN. Impossible, my dear sir! Incredible!

BANKER. Precisely. All the same, he guarantees not to leave one stone on top of another.

CLERGYMAN. Good gracious, this will never do!

BANKER. I have tried to appeal to his intelligence, but he has none; so perhaps you can do something with him.

CLERGYMAN. Yes, yes, of course, the Church! Our duty! I shall be most happy.

BANKER (*wringing his hand*). Thank you, Doctor, thank you!

CLERGYMAN. Pray don't mention it, sir. I shall esteem it a privilege. (*He clears his throat and calls mildly into the pit.*) My good man!

(*The* BANKER *sits down on a stone. The* MAN *stops dig-*

ging and straightens up. When he sees the CLERGYMAN, *he removes his cap.*)

MAN. Were you speaking to me, sir?

CLERGYMAN. I was—I am—ahem—— (*In pulpit style.*) Young man, I am deeply grieved to learn that you contemplate a departure from the path of righteousness. Ahem——

MAN. You mean about the bomb, sir?

CLERGYMAN. I do.

MAN. I'm very sorry you feel that way about it, sir; but I assure you it has nothing to do with righteousness; it's simply a question of principle.

CLERGYMAN. A question of what?

MAN. A question of principle.

CLERGYMAN (*retiring hastily toward the* BANKER). Dear me, this is quite outside my experience!

MAN (*preparing to resume his work*). Was there anything else, sir?

CLERGYMAN (*stammering*). Why, er—I—er——

BANKER (*twitching at his sleeve—in a hoarse whisper*). Try something out of the Bible!

CLERGYMAN. Ah, yes, of course, to be sure. Hm—now let me see. (*He thumbs hurriedly through his book.*) It's such an unusual case, you know. Hm—hm—— (*To the* MAN.) Just a moment, young man, if you please.

MAN. Certainly, sir.

CLERGYMAN (*he finds a suitable text*). Yes, yes, here it is. . . . Most appropriate. . . . Irresistible. (*Resuming his pulpit style with a premonitory cough.*) Young man, if you please, kindly give me your attention.

MAN. Yes, sir.

CLERGYMAN. I shall read number ten from the ninety-first Psalm. Ahem—"There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." (*He closes the book, and proceeds with the sermon.*) I take the words of the Psalmist as my text to-day: "Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." I beg you to reflect. Consider the meaning of these words: "Plague—dwelling—not to come

nigh——" (*The unperturbed demeanor of the* MAN *disconcerts him. He stammers lamely.*) There is a lesson for us in this—in these—ahem—— (*Dropping his pulpit manner, nervously.*) Well, young man, I suppose you can't deny that a bomb is a plague.

MAN. It's a very pretty verse, sir.

BANKER (*whispering*). It won't do. Give him something stronger!

CLERGYMAN (*whispering*). I can't think of anything to fit the circumstances. You see, there's nothing about bombs in the Ten Commandments.

BANKER. There ought to be.

CLERGYMAN. I'm very sorry. I think if I went home and talked with my curate——

BANKER. You can't do that. There isn't time.

CLERGYMAN. Dear me, to be sure. I was quite forgetting! Hm—hm! Well, let me see. Hm!—(*He ponders for a moment, then turns back to the* MAN *with sudden inspiration.*) Young man!

MAN. Sir?

CLERGYMAN. Are you a Christian?

MAN (*hesitating*). Well, sir, y-e-s, in a manner of speaking, I am.

CLERGYMAN. Will you be good enough to explain what you mean by that?

MAN. It's a bit difficult, sir, but I'll try. (*He pauses to consider the matter carefully.*) According to my way of thinking, the first duty of every man is to live up to his principles. I hope you agree with that, sir? (*The* BANKER *begins to fidget uneasily.*)

CLERGYMAN. Yes, yes, of course. Go on!

MAN. Well, then, I'm a Christian just so far as it don't interfere with my principles.

CLERGYMAN. But Christianity can't interfere with your principles.

MAN. I'm very glad to hear you say that, sir; because it's what I've always thought myself. (*He sighs contentedly.*)

So I am a Christian, after all—very pleasant and comforting. (*He picks up his shovel and begins to dig, chanting softly.*) Principle: the first duty of man. The first duty of man: principle.

CLERGYMAN (*retreats in confusion, mopping the perspiration from his brow*). Dear me, what an extraordinary situation! If I could only consult the Bishop!

BANKER (*springing from his seat and pacing about—irritably*). It simply won't do. You haven't gone strong enough.

CLERGYMAN. But, my dear sir, what more can I do?

BANKER. It's no good; it's too wishy-washy; it hasn't any punch. Try damnation, or—or hellfire with brimstone.

CLERGYMAN (*shocked*). Oh, my dear sir!

BANKER (*sulkily*). Well, a little brimstone wouldn't hurt anything.

CLERGYMAN. It's quite out of the question. It isn't done any more.

BANKER (*with a sigh of resignation*). All right, leave out the brimstone.

CLERGYMAN (*sadly*). I regret to say, it is impossible.

BANKER (*aghast*). What! No damnation?

(*The* CLERGYMAN *sorrowfully shakes his head.*)

BANKER. No hellfire? (*The* CLERGYMAN *shakes his head again.*) Not even a little hellfire?

CLERGYMAN (*mournfully*). Not a flicker.

BANKER (*pointing to the* MAN *and the bomb—bitterly*). Well, there you see the result of your new-fangled notions of religion.

CLERGYMAN (*faltering*). It's the modern idea. We have to be up to date, otherwise——

BANKER (*savagely interrupting*). That isn't the point. If the Church can't protect my property, what good is it? That's what I want to know. What good is it?

CLERGYMAN. We do the best we can; we——

(*The* JUDGE *comes into view, hurrying along the walk. He is a large, imposing man with a boisterous manner, and a loud, rough voice. He wears a broad-brimmed slouch hat*

and a Prince Albert coat. The BANKER, *with an exclamation of satisfaction, runs eagerly to meet him.*)

BANKER. Judge! Judge! I'm glad to see you. You're the very man to put a stop to this nonsense.

JUDGE (*booming*). What nonsense? What's wrong? What's the matter?

BANKER (*anxiously*). Sh!—not so loud. There's a man over there with a bomb.

JUDGE (*bellowing*). Well, what of it?

BANKER. He's going to blow up my building.

JUDGE. Humph! Nothing startling about that. However, I'll see what I can do about it. (*He strides to the edge of the pit, and plants one foot on the brass cylinder without observing what it is.*) Here, my man, come out of that! (*The* MAN *straightens up and regards the* JUDGE *with respectful interest. The* BANKER *sits down with a hopeful air beside the* CLERGYMAN *on the opposite side of the pit.*)

MAN. I beg your pardon, were you speaking to me?

JUDGE. Yes, I was. I'm a Judge. I dare say you know what that is?

MAN (*absently*). Yes, sir. (*He is looking anxiously at the* JUDGE'S *feet.*)

JUDGE. I administer the laws. The people that break them are brought before me. Some of them I hang, and the rest I send to jail. Look me in the eye! (*In a hoarse whisper across the pit.*) Out and out criminal, I have no doubt. Observe his shifty gaze! (*Roaring at the* MAN.) Well, have you got a tongue? What have you got to say for yourself?

MAN (*his eyes fixed on the* JUDGE'S *feet*). I don't think it's entirely safe, sir.

JUDGE. What do you mean? What isn't safe?

MAN. You see, you're standing on my bomb.

JUDGE. What! (*He backs away hurriedly and goes around to the opposite side of the pit.*)

MAN. It might not do any harm; still, I think it's taking un-

necessary chances. (*He picks up the bomb and carefully wipes off the dirt.*)

JUDGE (*glaring at the* CLERGYMAN). The man is simple-minded. It's a case for the clergy.

CLERGYMAN. I endeavored to appeal to his spiritual nature, but——

BANKER. He has no spiritual nature, and no intelligence.

CLERGYMAN. If I could only have a talk with my curate. He's a young man and so modern. I wish——

BANKER (*moodily*). It's no good. Without hellfire you're quite useless.

JUDGE. We must impress him with the consequences of his misdeeds. We must, in short, inspire him with terror.

BANKER (*hopefully*). Yes, yes, that's the thing exactly.

JUDGE (*sonorously*). Be calm! Be confident! Trust everything to me! I understand these cattle. I know them.

BANKER (*rising and gripping his hand*). Thank you, Judge, thank you! (*With an expectant smile, he resumes his seat.*)

(*The* JUDGE *advances to the edge of the pit, and loudly clears his throat to command attention. The* MAN *has finished polishing the bomb. He puts it down and looks inquiringly at the* JUDGE.)

JUDGE. My friend, do you know what will happen to you if you persist in perpetrating this outrage?

MAN. Happen to me?

JUDGE. Yes, to you.

MAN. No, sir, I don't.

JUDGE. Very good, I shall inform you.

MAN. If you please, sir.

JUDGE. You will be arrested; you will be brought into my court; you will be tried. And you will be found guilty; and I shall sentence you to be hanged. Yes, hanged by the neck until you are dead. Now what have you got to say to that?

MAN (*after a thoughtful pause*). Well, sir, it's- it's not a very pleasant outlook, is it?

JUDGE (*triumphantly*). Ah-ha! So you recognize that fact,

do you? (*He looks at the* BANKER *and the* CLERGYMAN *for approval, and they nod their heads encouragingly.*)

MAN. But excuse me, sir, may I ask you a question?

JUDGE. Certainly, as many as you like.

MAN. Thank you, sir. I just wanted to know who will arrest me?

JUDGE (*smiling indulgently*). Who? Why, the police, of course.

MAN. But they won't know who did it.

JUDGE (*blankly*). Won't know who did it!

MAN (*shaking his head, and picking up his shovel*). No, sir. They never do.

(*The* JUDGE *opens his mouth to speak, but nothing comes of it except a choking sound in his throat. He throws out his arms wildly and staggers backward into the arms of the* BANKER *and the* CLERGYMAN, *who have leaped in consternation from their seats.*)

CLERGYMAN. If you'd fan him a little, sir, with your hat.

BANKER. Yes, yes, of course. Poor fellow! What a pity! (*He fans furiously.*) I say, you don't happen to have a flask about you, Doctor?

CLERGYMAN. Really, no. I'm so sorry. I do wish my curate was here. Such a modern young man, so resourceful! You've no idea——

BANKER. It's no matter. He's coming round, I think. (*Pleadingly.*) Judge, my dear Judge, you're feeling a little better now?

JUDGE (*mumbling*). Where am I? What happened?

BANKER. It's all right, Judge. Everything is all right.

JUDGE (*gradually recovering his strength and faculties*). Ah, yes, I am beginning to remember: He—the man—he said to me—— (*He shudders.*)

CLERGYMAN. Pray, sir, don't distress yourself.

JUDGE (*muttering angrily to himself*). The majesty and dignity of the law, outraged, insulted! It is too much—too much! (*He advances groggily to the pit and bellows.*)

Renegade! (*The* MAN *looks up.*) You do not fear the police?

MAN. No, sir.

JUDGE. You do not fear the long arm of the law?

MAN. No, sir.

JUDGE (*shouting*). Have you no sense of justice? Have you no principles?

BANKER (*rushing forward and seizing the* JUDGE *by the arm*). No, no, no! No! You're on the wrong track. Stop, stop! (*To the* MAN.) Don't answer that question! Don't say a word! Go on and dig!

(*The* CLERGYMAN *begins to chant softly to himself: "Principle, the first duty of man. The first duty of man, Principle." The* MAN *resumes his work.*)

JUDGE. But—but—I don't understand. I——

BANKER (*leading him away from the pit*). Never mind. It's all right, only we—we've been all over that. (*He mops his brow.*) I'm sorry, but it won't do, you know; it won't do. (*They sit down on either side of the* CLERGYMAN, *who is still chanting dreamily to himself.*)

BANKER (*frigidly*). Would you be good enough to stop that?

CLERGYMAN. I'm so sorry. I wasn't thinking. It—it has a sort of rhythm.

BANKER. Humph!

(*There is a long silence. The* BANKER *is dejected, the* CLERGYMAN *crestfallen, the* JUDGE *cheerful. He lights a cigar. The* MAN *in the pit is whistling softly.*)

JUDGE (*cheerfully*). As a matter of fact, there's no real occasion for concern. You can safely entrust everything to me. The law will take its course.

BANKER (*brightening a little*). Do you really think so?

JUDGE. I am sure of it. The man will unquestionably be hanged.

BANKER. It's very good of you to say so.

JUDGE. It may take a little time. My calendar is very full just now. Yes, it may take several years. But ultimately the man will be hanged.

CLERGYMAN. Dear me, what a dreadful situation! I do wish there was some other course. I must have a talk with the Bishop. These things are so distressing.

JUDGE (*peevishly*). Well, if you know anything better to do, why don't you do it?

CLERGYMAN. I—I——

BANKER. No, no, he had his chance. I'm with you, Judge. By all means let the man be hanged.

CLERGYMAN. I suppose it's inevitable, but my heart bleeds for the unfortunate creature. I can't help it. (*He sobs.*)

JUDGE. If the Church did its duty, we'd be free of these criminals.

CLERGYMAN. You're very hard on us, sir. I'm sure we do all we can. I have a tea for nursing mothers twice a month, and there is dancing in the rectory every Thursday.

JUDGE. Humph!

CLERGYMAN. Our Anti-Alcoholic League was just getting nicely started when the country went dry. I don't know what the world is coming to, I really don't.

JUDGE. Bah! You've lost your nerve: that's the trouble. You've got no backbone.

BANKER. And no hellfire.

CLERGYMAN. I—I am overwhelmed by these reproaches.

JUDGE (*grumbling to himself*). Damn nuisance! Mess up everything!—Nursing mothers!—Tea!—Dancing!—Rectory!—Bah!

BANKER. There's a great deal of truth in what the Judge says, but there's no need to quarrel about it among ourselves. The first thing to do is to get this man into a good strong jail.

JUDGE (*horrified*). You don't mean to say you want to put him in jail now?

BANKER. Well, certainly! Why not? You said you were going to hang him, didn't you?

JUDGE. But I can't hang him now.

BANKER. Of course, I understand that; but he has to be locked up somewhere till you're ready.

JUDGE. I don't know what you're thinking about. If you

lock him up now you'll spoil the whole thing, and I shan't be able to hang him at all.

BANKER. Well, then, when are we to lock him up?

JUDGE. After he blows up the building, of course.

BANKER (*shrieking*). But it's my building, and I don't want it blown up!

JUDGE. Calm yourself. Be reasonable. You want the man hanged, don't you?

BANKER. Yes, I do.

JUDGE. Well, if he doesn't blow up the building, what am I going to hang him for? Answer me that, will you?

BANKER. But I want him hanged first.

JUDGE. Ah, so that's it, is it? You want the crime prevented. It is plain that you know nothing about the law.

BANKER (*springing to his feet and pacing about frantically*). But what good is the law if it won't protect my property?

JUDGE (*rising*). You're a most unreasonable man. You're not satisfied with anything.

(*The* COMMUNIST *approaches along the walk. He is a frail, pale-faced young man, with wild eyes and large shell-rimmed spectacles. His clothing is threadbare and too small for him, and he is badly in need of a shave. The* JUDGE *perceives him and starts with surprise.*)

JUDGE. I seem to remember your face. Have you ever been in my court?

COMMUNIST (*snappishly*). Yes, I have.

JUDGE. I thought so.— Ha! I place you now. You're the fellow that blew up the Governor's mansion. I sentenced you to the penitentiary last week for the rest of your life. What are you doing here?

COMMUNIST. I've been pardoned.

JUDGE. What! Already?

COMMUNIST. I was up there three days. What do you expect?

JUDGE. Who pardoned you?

COMMUNIST. The Governor. He shook hands with me. He didn't like the drains.

JUDGE. The drains!

COMMUNIST. Yes, the drains in the old house. And now they have to build him a new one.

JUDGE. Humph! Well, that's no affair of mine. The law was properly administered, and that's all that concerns me. I suppose you won't deny you got a square trial?

COMMUNIST (*sullenly*). Oh, as square as any of them, I guess.

JUDGE (*smiling blandly and extending his hand*). And there's no hard feeling?

COMMUNIST (*shaking hands without enthusiasm*). N-n-o. There's nothing small about me, thank God.

JUDGE. I'm glad you feel that way. It does you credit. (*He hands him a card.*) I'm coming up for reëlection next month. I hope you won't forget me.

COMMUNIST. Humph!

JUDGE. There's another thing: a little favor for a friend of mine. I wonder if you would.

COMMUNIST (*cautiously*). W-e-l-l, I might. What is it? What do you want?

JUDGE. There's a fellow over there with a bomb. He's going to blow up that building which belongs to my friend. Now, I dare say, he belongs to your organization, and I thought perhaps you'd be good enough to call him off.

COMMUNIST. Who is your friend?

JUDGE. He—er—well, to be perfectly honest with you, he's a banker. (*He points over his shoulder at the* BANKER, *who is sitting beside the* CLERGYMAN *in an attitude of deep dejection, with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands.*)

COMMUNIST. Banker! Nothing doing! (*He starts to walk away. The* JUDGE *seizes his arm.*)

JUDGE. But a most unusual banker, a good banker, an—er—an honest banker.

COMMUNIST (*shaking his head*). There's no such thing.

JUDGE. I vouch for him.

COMMUNIST (*sneering*). Is he a ten or a twelve per center?

JUDGE. Only nine; I swear it. Come, be a good fellow! You won't regret it. (*He leads him toward the pit.*)

COMMUNIST. Suppose I should be seen with you and—and a banker? I'd be ruined, I tell you. It's a most embarrassing situation for a man of my standing. I've got a—— (*With a sigh of resignation.*) Oh, very well. I'll see what I can do about it. (*He walks to the edge of the pit and picks up the bomb.*)

JUDGE (*approaching the* BANKER). That gentleman is a friend of mine. He has volunteered to help you.

(*The* BANKER *and the* CLERGYMAN *jump up excitedly. They talk in whispers, and watch the proceedings anxiously.*)

COMMUNIST (*shouting into the pit*). Hi, there, comrade! (*The* MAN *stops working and looks up.*) I see you use the B. B. brand. How do you like them?

MAN. I've had very good success with them.

COMMUNIST. I use the "Workman's Friend"; cheaper and just as reliable. Well, every one to his taste, eh? (*He puts down the bomb.*) If it isn't a personal question, whose job is this?

MAN. Mine.

COMMUNIST. Yes, I know; but who put you up to it—the Committee of Fifteen or the Council of Four?

MAN. I don't understand what you mean.

COMMUNIST. Come, comrade, speak right out! You've no need to be afraid of me. I'm the chairman of the Committee of Public Peril. Look here. See! (*He winks mysteriously, makes gestures with his hands, and utters unintelligible words. The* MAN *watches him with an expression of bewilderment.*) I say, what's wrong with you? Don't you know the signs?

MAN. I don't know what you're talking about.

COMMUNIST. Well, what are you doing this for?

MAN. It's a question of principle.

COMMUNIST. A question of what?

MAN. A question of principle.

(*The* COMMUNIST *stares at him with an air of stupefaction. After a moment the* MAN *resumes his work.*)

COMMUNIST (*shrugging his shoulders and turning away from the pit*). Principle?—Principle? (*He shakes his head.*) I'm afraid I can't help you. He's not one of us.

BANKER (*with a hollow groan*). Oh, these Bolsheviki—these Bolsheviki!

COMMUNIST (*snarling*). What do you mean by that, eh? I tell you that man isn't one of us. He's probably one of your customers gone nutty trying to pay your extortions.

BANKER. Who are you? Who are you?

COMMUNIST. I'm a Communist, and I'm proud of it.

BANKER (*aghast*). A Communist! (*He turns to the* JUDGE.) There's no security anywhere. It's an outrage. This man ought to be in jail.

CLERGYMAN. Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

JUDGE (*gloomily*). I put him in jail last week.

BANKER. Why didn't you keep him there?

JUDGE. I—er—I——

COMMUNIST. Rubbish! Nobody stays in jail any more. It's a formality.

BANKER. I want protection against these outlaws and assassins. As a peaceful, law-abiding citizen, I demand it.

COMMUNIST. Outlaws and assassins, eh? That's your idea of us. Why, you pin-headed fool, we're the saviors of the world. The future of the human race is in our hands. We're going to save this country—what's left of it.

CLERGYMAN. But Christianity, my dear sir,—the teachings of the great Savior?

COMMUNIST. Old stuff, parson, old stuff!

JUDGE (*snapping viciously at the* CLERGYMAN). Why don't you mind your own business? What do you know about it?

CLERGYMAN (*whimpering*). I'm sure we do the best we can. We have dancing in the rectory, and——

BANKER (*shouting*). What good is dancing when we need hellfire?

(*At this moment the* POLICEMAN *strolls into view. He is*

a very short and a very fat policeman, in a very baggy uniform. He has a round, stupid face, red hair, and a rich brogue. He passes close to the excited group, and sits down unobserved on the opposite side of the pit. After a moment he picks up the bomb and examines it curiously, shaking it and holding it to his ear with evident interest and pleasure.)

COMMUNIST. Bah! The Church don't count one way or another. It's a medieval institution as dead as personal liberty. It's you and the rest of your porch-climbing profiteers! You've stolen the world, you sleek, well-fed crooks.

BANKER (*shaking his fist and choking with fury*). You—you—— (*Appealing to the* JUDGE.) Why don't you do something? Aren't you a Judge? Isn't there any law left in this land?

JUDGE (*in a hoarse whisper*). He's got a right to say what he thinks. It's guaranteed by the Constitution.

BANKER. But I thought the Democrats changed that?

JUDGE. Only during the war.

BANKER. Oh, that's it! Well, at least, when we had war, we had some peace.

COMMUNIST. Gag-law, that's what you want, you petty tyrant! And war, why wouldn't you want it? A few more millions in your dirty pockets!

BANKER. How dare you speak to me in that manner, you—you jail-bird?

CLERGYMAN. Gentlemen! Gentlemen! I beg of you.

COMMUNIST (*rolling up his sleeves*). Jail-bird, eh? I'll show you, you filthy robber! (*Advancing toward the* BANKER.) Get out of the way, parson.

(*The* POLICEMAN *has exhausted his childish interest in the bomb. He puts it down and at once becomes aware of the impending fracas. He watches the proceedings with growing displeasure.*)

BANKER (*pulling his hat over his ears and striking a defensive attitude*). Come on, you anarchist!

CLERGYMAN (*rushing between them*). No violence, gentlemen! I can't permit it. Respect for my cloth.

JUDGE (*grabbing him by the collar*). Let them alone! It's no affair of yours.

COMMUNIST. Get out of the way!

BANKER. Take him away!

JUDGE (*dragging him away*). Here, now, listen to me! Come out of that!

(*At this point, the* POLICEMAN *decides to intervene, and advances cautiuosly with drawn club.*)

POLICEMAN (*shouting*). Stop it! Stop it! You're under arrest, all of you.

(*There is general consternation. The* JUDGE *drops the* CLERGYMAN, *who, being the smallest and least dangerous-looking of the four, is immediately seized by the* POLICEMAN *to be used as a sort of shield. The* BANKER *and the* COMMUNIST, *at the point of blows, suspend activities and stare at the intruder. The* JUDGE *recovers his poise and takes command of the situation.*)

JUDGE (*expansively*). It's all right, Officer—quite all right. These gentlemen are friends of mine.

POLICEMAN. Oh-ho! Is that so? And who are you?

JUDGE. Why, surely you must know me. I'm a judge.

POLICEMAN. Are you, now? And isn't that wonderful? Well, you can tell the sergeant all about it.

JUDGE. But——

POLICEMAN (*flourishing his club*). No more of your sass now. You're under arrest, all of you, for disturbing the peace. You should take shame of yourselves. Come on! March! (*He herds them along.*)

(*Frantic Chorus:*)

BANKER. I won't go. It's an outrage. I'm a peaceable, law-abiding citizen. Stop shoving me! Take that stick out of my ribs! I'll have you broke for this. The Commissioner is a particular friend of mine. I'm a banker. My bank is right here in this building. Good Lord, this is perfectly absurd! Wait a minute, you fool! Listen to me! There's a man in that pit with a bomb. He's going to blow up my building. I say, wait! Look here, you idiot, I——

COMMUNIST. You thick-headed mick, haven't you got a single atom of brains? What are you pinching me for? Here I am defending the rights of the common people, and look what I get for it. Quit pushing me, will you? Ouch! Take that club out of my back! Well, let me explain! Wait a minute. Listen to me, will you? I was simply taking a stroll down the street, and this fat-head here took advantage of my good nature. I haven't done anything. Listen to me! I——

JUDGE. It's all a mistake, I tell you. You'll be sorry for this day's work. Look here, you jackass, don't you understand who I am? I can't make him understand anything with all this racket. Shut up! No, no, I'm trying to explain things to you. Stop pushing that man into me! I'm moving as fast as I can. Stupid imbecile! And this is what I get for trying to be helpful to a friend——

CLERGYMAN. Oh, dear me, what a situation! If my congregation ever hears of this I shall be ruined. If you please, sir, you're choking me. Have you no respect for my cloth? The rector of a parish? Your stick is bruising my ear. These gentlemen have done nothing wrong. It's all a hideous mistake, I assure you. If you'd just stop a moment, and let me explain. The Bishop will hear of this, I know he will. And the newspapers! Gracious Heavens!

POLICEMAN. Come along, now! Get along with you! It does you no good to screech like that; I can't hear a word you say. Here, you, step up there! And you! Come on, now, before I crack you one! You're going to the station whether you like it or not. I'd like to get you locked up, to be shut out of the noise. O-ho, you would, would you? None of your tricks, now! I've seen the like of you before. It'll do you no good to be screaming that way. Save your breath!

He herds them out of sight, and their frantic protests die away in the distance.

The MAN *in the pit has been watching the proceedings with an expression of mild interest. He sighs, shrugs his*

shoulders, and, whistling softly to himself, returns to his work.

The GIRL *comes into view. She is a cute-looking little thing, with fluffy blonde hair, brilliantly rouged cheeks and lips, and a shrill, hard voice. She wears a snappy suit and a jaunty velvet turban. Her skirt is short; indeed, so short that when she sits down it is a constant struggle to conceal her knee-caps. And her legs are charming: beautifully shaped, well-dressed, seductive. As she passes the pit, a stray clod from the* MAN'S *shovel rolls against her shoes. She stops short and scowls into the pit.*)

GIRL. Say, you big boob, why don't you look what you're doing?

MAN. I beg your pardon.

GIRL. You threw some dirt on my shoes.

MAN (*he looks at the shoes and is fascinated by the legs*). Did I? I'm very sorry.

GIRL (*mollified*). Well, it's no matter. It'll all come out in the wash, I guess. (*She sits down on a stone at the edge of the pit and studies the* MAN *with growing interest.*) What are you doing in there?

MAN. I'm digging a hole.

GIRL. Say, don't get fresh!

MAN (*shifting his gaze, with an effort, from ankles to eyes*). I didn't mean to be fresh.

GIRL (*suspiciously*). Didn't you?

MAN. No, really I didn't.

GIRL. Well, what are you making that hole for?

MAN (*his eyes have returned to the legs*). For a bomb.

GIRL (*indifferently*). Oh! (*Pause.*) What are you going to do with the bomb?

MAN. I'm going to blow up this building.

GIRL (*she considers the matter*). Make quite a mess, won't it?

MAN. Yes, it will.

GIRL (*cheerfully*). That's too bad. I don't like messes.

MAN (*crestfallen*). Don't you?

GIRL. I like things neat and tidy. I can't stand messes.

MAN (*helplessly*). I—I'm sorry.

GIRL. What are you doing it for?

MAN. It's a question of principle.

GIRL. A question of what?

MAN. A question of principle.

GIRL. Say, are you kidding me, or are you just plain nuts?

MAN (*looking into her eyes*). I'm not kidding you.

GIRL. Sure?

MAN (*intensely*). Sure.

(*She is flattered by his admiration, and a little embarrassed. She shifts her gaze, and his eyes immediately return to the hypnotic legs. She takes this opportunity to study him coolly and appraisingly. Her interest mounts. Her face assumes a coquettish expression, and her voice becomes seductive.*)

GIRL. You know, I kind of like your looks.

MAN (*without raising his eyes from the legs*). I'm glad you do, because I like yours.

GIRL. Can you dance?

MAN. Yes, a little.

GIRL. Well, say, I got a grand idea: There's a swell cabaret down the line where they got a good floor, and some good jazz, and if they know you, you can get some of the old "Eight Per Cent"— (*She gets up and shakes out her skirt.*) What do you say?

MAN. I'd like to, but——

GIRL. But what? (*She carelessly raises her skirt a little and points her toe.*)

MAN (*his eyes glisten—his voice falters*). I—I—that is—— Well, what about my principles?

GIRL. My Gawd! Why worry about them? You can have principles when you can't have anything else. (*She holds out her hand.*)

MAN (*his eyes on the legs*). You know—I believe you're right. (*He grasps her hand and begins to climb out of the pit.*)

CURTAIN

AND THERE WAS LIGHT

BY

CHARLES O'BRIEN KENNEDY

CHARLES O'BRIEN KENNEDY

Charles O'Brien Kennedy, born at Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1879, is an actor by profession, and has appeared in a large number of New York productions under the direction of Arthur Hopkins, The Theatre Guild, etc.

He has also been stage director for The Provincetown Players, producing at the Playhouse works by Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Dreiser, and others. He is the author of a number of one-act and full-length plays, among which is *Boys Will Be Boys,* founded on a short story by Irvin S. Cobb.

And There Was Light is based on a story by Irvin S. Cobb. Besides this, Mr. Kennedy's play *Boys Will Be Boys* is also published.

CHARACTERS

THE DOCTOR, *aged thirty-five*
THE NURSE, *aged fifty*
MRS. PENDLETON, *aged thirty-five*
THE GIRL, *aged twenty-two*

SCENE: *The Doctor's Office.*

TIME: *The present year. A fine day about the middle of September at twelve-thirty noon.*

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AND THERE WAS LIGHT

The office of a prosperous nerve specialist. It is furnished with simple elegance.

Bookcase against back wall right of center arch. Flat-top desk right of stage center, with swivel chair back and plain chair left of it. Sofa left of stage center. Victrola against wall in hallway center. Other characteristic furniture about the room.

Large window down right showing park in distance. Arch in center at back with hallway beyond. Door upper left. Arch and window hung with portieres which will exclude all light when drawn. Desk lamp on desk. Bracket lamps on walls, with white lights. (These lights are on at rise of curtain and are controlled by a switch off stage.)

Large chandelier with amber lights hangs in center. (This is also controlled by switch off stage independent of other lights. It is off at rise of curtain.)

The hallway is lighted with white bunch or flood light from one side. It changes to a mysterious blue just before portieres are drawn for GIRL'S *entrance.*

Outside the window is a warm, inspiring, but not glaring, sunlight.

DOCTOR. *(He is amiable and sympathetic. Must be played with a light touch and is never ponderous. Every move he now makes is apparently a part of a definitely arranged scheme. Takes photo of* GIRL *which is in frame right of desk and places it left of desk, half facing the sofa. Dumps box of chocolates into candy tray on desk. Takes vase of flowers from bookcase and puts it on desk. Crosses to sofa*

left and sits surveying the desk. A quick thought strikes him and he rises, gets surgeon's bag from briefcase and places it before GIRL'S *photo so that it is concealed from left of stage. Takes a last survey of desk, smiles, looks at watch, and calls out*) Nurse! (*Resumes survey of desk.*)

NURSE (*after pause she enters. She is a common-sense, practical woman with a sense of humor, although a trifle perplexed at the moment*). Yes, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Everything ready?

NURSE. Everything. As far as I can understand.

DOCTOR (*teasing*). Just how far is that?

NURSE. As far as you can explain.

DOCTOR (*smiles*). How does this layout strike you? (*Indicating desk.*)

NURSE. Guess you know what you're doing. Crazy cures for crazy people.

DOCTOR. Good. I'll leave the sane part of the job for you. This may look funny to you just now, but it's a mighty serious case for me. So——

NURSE. Doctor, I promise I won't laugh until you're out of the house.

DOCTOR. The lights working all right?

NURSE. I've tested them three times.

DOCTOR. Fine. (*Mysteriously indicating arch at back.*) Is she all ready? In there?

NURSE. Straining at the leash.

DOCTOR. That's a habit with you women.

NURSE. When I think of some of the specimens of men we have to drag after us——

DOCTOR. Well, just now don't make yourself unhappy thinking about us. (*Looks at watch.*) Mrs. Pendleton is late.

NURSE. I wish she wouldn't come at all. Her nerves get on mine.

DOCTOR. That's a usual compliment between you women.

NURSE. I know this much. When a rich woman who's got everything in the world she wants begins to get nervous from

doing nothing—she's headed for the sanitarium or the divorce court.

DOCTOR. Now—now——

NURSE. Your father always said the same thing. I'm going to tell your sweetheart not to know too much about you after you're married. Then you'll be a happy couple.

DOCTOR. I've always tried to obey *you* as best I could.

NURSE. Because you know your sweetheart likes me. (*Doorbell rings violently.*) That's Mrs. Pendleton. Her nerves hitting on all six. What do you want me to do now?

DOCTOR. Keep her waiting until I take a last look. Tell her I'm with another patient. (NURSE *exits* L.U. DOCTOR *takes last hurried survey of room. Closes portieres on window* R. *His manner becomes serious.*)

MRS. PENDLETON (*outside—in high, nervous voice*). I won't wait a minute—I can't wait! How dare you! How dare you! (DOCTOR *sits hurriedly back of desk.* MRS. PENDLETON *rushes in. She is a handsome woman, stylishly dressed. Very distracted and nervous. Has all the manner of a spoiled child. Rushes to* DOCTOR *and points to* NURSE, *who has followed her on, and says imperiously*) Doctor! Doctor! I want that woman discharged!

DOCTOR (*rising*). Why, Mrs. Pendleton! What has she done?

MRS. PENDLETON. She had the impudence to tell *me* that I am late. That *I* would have to wait for you.

DOCTOR. But I had another patient.

MRS. PENDLETON. Let the other patient wait.

DOCTOR. You see, your appointment was for——

MRS. PENDLETON. My life is not regulated by clocks. Besides, it wasn't my fault. Every car I own was in our garage excepting the one *I wanted to-day*. So if *I* had to wait, why can't *you?* You're a nerve specialist.

DOCTOR (*humoring her*). How many cars do you own now, Mrs. Pendleton?

MRS. PENDLETON. Six. And I'm tired of every one of them.

DOCTOR. Oh, I see. Well—you let me keep my nurse and I'll take the cars off your hands. (*Nods to* NURSE, *who exits* C., *drawing portieres very carefully so as to exclude all light from hall.*)

MRS. PENDLETON (*who has watched this action suspiciously, says suddenly*). Why did she draw those curtains? Is she going to listen?

DOCTOR. No, dear lady. But a woman of your social standing should have the most complete privacy from the outer world. Your illness is more sacred than most people's. Come, now.

MRS. PENDLETON (*slowly and intensely, with all the suffering that one would expect from a woman who has been spoiled and petted into a highly nervous state*). Doctor—you must help me. Drugs—narcotics—anything. I haven't slept for two nights. I sat up or walked the floor. Trying to keep from screaming or going mad.

DOCTOR. Why didn't you call on me?

MRS. PENDLETON. You know I don't like your nurse. I simply forced myself to come here. You see the state I'm in. I'm not accustomed to forcing myself to do anything I don't want to do. (DOCTOR *smiles whimsically, unseen by her.*) Now you know how desperate I am when I come here against my will.

DOCTOR. There are other doctors.

MRS. PENDLETON. I don't trust any doctor, excepting——

DOCTOR (*as she steps short*). You need not say it. Thank you. And now, Mrs. Pendleton, that we are agreed on one point, won't you be seated? (*Leads her to sofa.*) I have already told you that you must rest.

MRS. PENDLETON. Rest! Rest! How can I rest? If I do that I begin to *think*. No. I must keep on the go. Something drives me on—to keep going until I drop.

DOCTOR. You can't find rest at home?

MRS. PENDLETON. I'm tired of home.

DOCTOR. You have a good husband and lovely children.

MRS. PENDLETON. They don't understand *me*.

DOCTOR. Maybe it would be different if you sat down with them a while. We make all our friends through association.

MRS. PENDLETON (*rising and pacing floor*). Friends! Friends! I have no friends. (*Suddenly, with an outburst of confidence.*) Do you know what *my friend*, Clara Aikens, did to me? Do you know?

DOCTOR (*as if scenting the reason for her latest outburst*). No. What has Clara been up to? I thought she was busy entertaining that Italian prince.

MRS. PENDLETON. That's just it. *I* entertained the prince abroad, but when he came here Clara walked off with him. She actually had the insolence to invite me to the reception she gave for him.

DOCTOR. That was better than *not* inviting you.

MRS. PENDLETON. It would be an insult either way. You know women.

DOCTOR. I've still got a lot to learn. You've been used to a good deal of your own way, haven't you?

MRS. PENDLETON. Oh! You think I'm self-willed; but ever since I've been a child I've always had my own way.

DOCTOR. Which means that if anyone else tries to have his own way——

MRS. PENDLETON. I quarrel with him—naturally.

DOCTOR. Naturally. Well, *I* never contradict you, even when you say I'm a good doctor. That's why we get on so well together. (*Smiles—says gently.*) Did you bring that photograph of your children? (MRS. PENDLETON *hands him photo which she has brought in. She sits on sofa—then says suspiciously*) What do you want that for?

DOCTOR. Because those children make me envy you. It's a fine thing—to be envied, eh? You see, *you* have what *I* want.

MRS. PENDLETON. Don't *you* ever marry. I'll not have a doctor who will compare his wife with me when my back is turned.

DOCTOR. Comparisons between women are dangerous things

to the man who makes them. Particularly when the women hear about it. I never do. All the same, I wish I had three such children as you have. (*Looking at photo*) They are wonderful, aren't they? And you love them—don't you?

MRS. PENDLETON (*touched*). Oh, I want to love them again! I do—I do——

DOCTOR. Why don't you take the children and travel a bit—on a slow boat—(*Quickly, as she starts to interrupt*)—or a fast one, if you like—and see a lot of things.

MRS. PENDLETON. What is there new for me to see? What is there worth seeing?

DOCTOR. But the children——

MRS. PENDLETON. Doctor, *I've* been all over the world. I've seen *everything.*

DOCTOR (*going to desk—mysteriously*). That *is* unfortunate. *You* have seen everything in the world. *You* have everything you want. (*Starts fumbling with surgeon's bag. His talk becomes deliberately rambling*) If something new comes into the world to-morrow, *you* can buy it. And yet many people haven't anything—can't have anything—not even hope.

MRS. PENDLETON (*crossing to him, apprehensively—suddenly*). What's in that bag?

DOCTOR. Surgical instruments.

MRS. PENDLETON (*terrified*). You're not going to operate on me?

DOCTOR (*indicates bag*). No. I don't know how it got here.

MRS. PENDLETON. That nurse put it there to upset me. Please take it away. (DOCTOR *removes bag, revealing photo of* GIRL. *Puts bag on bookcase, back. Her eyes light on photo. She crosses to chair left of desk and sits, gazing at photo. He watches intently. Comes down slowly and puts children's photo in upright position. His eyes are fixed on her. She speaks more calmly*) What a wonderful face that girl has! How beautiful! How peaceful!

DOCTOR. She's a patient of mine.

MRS. PENDLETON (*Looking up*). Is her case as bad as mine?

DOCTOR. Dear lady—very few cases are as bad as yours.

MRS. PENDLETON. Of course not. (*Again looking at photo*) If I could only be like that. She has the face of a woman who has everything she wants.

DOCTOR. No. She has very few of the things that any of us want. Still, she has more than any of us can ever have.

MRS. PENDLETON. Please don't talk in riddles.

DOCTOR. Things that just can't be bought, such as Faith, Hope and Charity. She has the kind of mind that is stronger than misfortune.

MRS. PENDLETON. Nobody is like that.

DOCTOR (*quite sharply*). Let me tell you——

MRS. PENDLETON (*a bit scared*). You're not going to tell me not to come here any more?

DOCTOR (*fixing his eye on hers as he speaks*). That depends. But please sit down. (*She sits, compelled by his steady gaze,* L. *of desk.*) Something happened to this girl when she was about five years old. She became deaf and blind. Her sense of smell and taste was impaired. But she could always speak—you see she's a woman. She is perfectly normal otherwise. And yet she was doomed to a life sentence inside the walls of darkness and silence. (*She gazes at photo.*) I found her in an asylum for the blind. I decided that something could be done—that I would make it my life's work to do it. If I fail, my life is a failure. I brought her here to my house.

MRS. PENDLETON (*timidly*). She is here? Now?

DOCTOR. Yes.

MRS. PENDLETON (*on the defensive*). At least, *her* nerves—— (DOCTOR *stops her with stern gesture as she half rises. She resumes chair.*) Please tell me some more. You see—I'm—interested.

DOCTOR. I operated about a year ago. She's been in a dark room ever since. The only light she ever had was—let's say Hope. But to-day I'm going to know whether I'm a failure or not. *She* was the patient who had to wait for *you.* (MRS. PENDLETON *winces. He looks at watch.*) It's just

about time. I wonder if I dare? I wonder if I ought to show her the light? You see, I don't know all about women and you can help me.

MRS. PENDLETON (*after a pause—nervously*). I think I had better be going—I feel better.

DOCTOR (*quickly—tempo of scene now increases*). Don't go. I may want you to help me with my patient.

MRS. PENDLETON (*rising—hysterically*). I must go. I can't stand other people's suffering. I never could.

DOCTOR (*seizes her wrists and swings her to front of sofa, speaking with sudden force*). You'll not go! You'll have to stand it! Good Heavens, woman, aren't you willing to do a little good for others?

MRS. PENDLETON. I can't stand it, I tell you——

DOCTOR (*calling loudly*). Nurse!

MRS. PENDLETON. Please—please!

DOCTOR. You made her wait for you. Now you'll wait for her. Nurse!

NURSE (*enters hurriedly*). Yes, Doctor?

DOCTOR. You've given orders that nobody shall enter or leave this room?

NURSE. Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Good! If Mrs. Pendleton tries to leave, put her under chloroform. Bring in the patient.

(*The* NURSE *goes out. Desk and bracket lights go out—amber lights in chandelier come on.* NURSE *opens C. portieres wide, revealing a young, beautiful* GIRL *with a bandage over her eyes.* MRS. PENDLETON *sits on sofa in silent terror.* DOCTOR *places chair under chandelier.* NURSE *leads* GIRL *to chair, where she sits.* DOCTOR *takes* GIRL'S *hand sympathetically. He is* R. *of her.* GIRL *looks up into his face as if trying to see through bandage.*)

DOCTOR. Now, Mrs. Pendleton, we'll see how people act when they get what they've always wanted. (*Gently takes bandage from the* GIRL'S *eyes.*)

GIRL (*passes. Raises head—looks up at light, then at* DOCTOR. *She takes his hands*). The light—I see—I see——

DOCTOR. Yes, my child. (NURSE *has quickly turned on Victrola, which plays softly.*)

GIRL (*listens ecstatically*). What is that? What is that?

DOCTOR. Music, my child.

GIRL. Yes—I remember.

DOCTOR. Some people won't listen to it.

GIRL. You mean they are deaf—as I was?

DOCTOR. Something of the sort.

GIRL. Then there are worse things than being deaf?

DOCTOR (*hands her candy tray—she takes a piece of candy*). Yes. Eat this.

GIRL (*eats*). Ummm—isn't that lovely?

DOCTOR. It is, but you mustn't eat too much of it.

GIRL. Do people have too much of things so sweet?

DOCTOR. I've seen such cases.

GIRL (*spies flowers on desk and runs to them, burying her face among them, giving exclamations of joy*). Flowers—I thought I would never see you again! (*As she folds them to her breast one drops on floor.*) Oh! I've hurt it!

DOCTOR (*picking up flower*). Don't worry, dear—there are plenty of those in the world.

GIRL. The world—the world—where is that?

DOCTOR (*opens portieres on window—sunlight streams in*). Out here——

GIRL (*rushes to window*). The world—the light—it's so much bigger—so much brighter out there. Let's not stay in this little place. Let's go out. (*Turns and sees* MRS. PENDLETON *for the first time. Takes a few steps toward her.*) Aren't you beautiful!

DOCTOR. I forgot to mention that the child's sense of beauty is all right.

GIRL (*impulsively getting candy, goes to* MRS. PENDLETON *and offers it, together with flowers*). Here! Won't you share these with me?

MRS. PENDLETON. I don't want them. I don't like——

GIRL. Why not? Oh, I see! You are sick from having too

many sweet things. Can't you help her, Doctor? Can't you?

MRS. PENDLETON (*after a pause—nervously*). Please turn off that music.

GIRL. You've had too much of that, too?

MRS. PENDLETON. Please, child. I don't want anything.

GIRL. Oh, yes, you do! There must be something. I know—you want some of my light. Come, and let me give it to you. (*Goes to window.*) Do come! Don't be afraid to take all you want. (*Suddenly.*) See the grass and the trees and the flowers!

DOCTOR. Mrs. Pendleton has all of those things she wants.

GIRL. What fun you must have giving them away! (*Again looking out window.*) See the children playing! Are any of them yours, Mrs. Pendleton?

DOCTOR. Perhaps.

GIRL. Why aren't you out with them—playing?

DOCTOR. Their nurse is with them.

GIRL. But they can't have much fun that way. Oh, I forgot—their poor mother is sick and can't play with her children.

DOCTOR (*handing her photo of children*). Here is their picture.

GIRL (*looking at picture*). Such angels! So like you. You couldn't have too much of *them* or they of you. Let me play with them every day until you are well again. I'll play with them now. (*She holds photo at arm's length and sings a couple of bars of some lively children's song. Stops suddenly.*) Oh, forgive me! I know now. You are deaf and blind as I was.

DOCTOR. Yes—that's exactly what the trouble is.

GIRL. Poor woman! But the Doctor will cure you. I will stay here and help you.

MRS. PENDLETON. There's nothing wrong with my ears or eyes.

GIRL. I mean the ears and eyes of your heart. Come! Let me do all I can until you are cured. Take my world——

MRS. PENDLETON (*desperately*). Please—please—this is torturing me! Let me go!

DOCTOR. Are you too selfish to see *anything* in life? This child is offering you everything she has.

MRS. PENDLETON (*derisively*). The world——

GIRL. No—the light—the light——

DOCTOR. Please accept the child's gift—no matter what you feel or believe. Do just one thing for someone else.

MRS. PENDLETON. I'm going, I tell you.

DOCTOR. Hasn't she offered you enough?

GIRL. Oh, I see. I've been selfish. I haven't offered you enough. Take the whole world, if that will help you. Take the children and the flowers and the light—take everything, if that will make you happy, and let me be deaf and blind again.

MRS. PENDLETON. You mean that?

GIRL. I want you to be happy. (MRS. PENDLETON *pauses—sinks to her knees.*) Come—come! Let there be light! (NURSE *stops the Victrola.*)

MRS. PENDLETON (*slowly*). And there was light. (*Rises quickly and happily.*) I see it now! I'm going home to my husband and children. I've found the cause of my sickness. You have made me see and hear what I couldn't see and hear before. For I've been deaf and blind like you, my child. I have everything to live for.

GIRL. Of course you have.

MRS. PENDLETON. I'll tell them all about you and the dear Doctor. You must come and see me when I can thank you enough. I see what I was—a vain, selfish woman—but I'll change all that and make others happy! God bless you both! God bless you—— (*Rushes off, followed by the* NURSE. *Door slams outside.*)

GIRL (*after pause, looks up timidly at* DOCTOR). I'm glad she didn't insist on my going with her now.

DOCTOR. I never knew you were as clever as that.

GIRL. The strange thing is I believed it myself after I got going. But then you have to believe what you say to suc-

ceed in my profession. (*Calls excitedly.*) Nurse—nurse—my things! My Stage Manager will be angry if I'm late. Good-bye, dearest Bill! I hope I won't turn out to be a wife like that—even for a minute! Dear old Bill— (*Kisses him.*) Be sure and be at the stage door right after my performance this afternoon and take me to dinner.

DOCTOR. Where'll we go?

GIRL. Take me right up here. Anywhere else I'm just an ingenue, but here I'm the leading lady. (*Rushes off, laughing as she says:*) Good-bye! Good-bye! (*The* DOCTOR *roars with laughter.*)

CURTAIN

AMONG THIEVES

BY

WILLIAM GILLETTE

WILLIAM GILLETTE

William Gillette was born at Hartford, Connecticut, in 1855. Although he took an interest in the theater at a comparatively early age, he managed to receive an education at Yale, Harvard, and the Massachusetts Fine Arts Institute. Since 1875, when he made his début as an actor, he has followed the professions of actor, manager and playwright. His more successful work has been in his own plays, chiefly *Sherlock Holmes, Secret Service,* and *Held by the Enemy,* and with his own extraordinarily successful adaptation of *The Private Secretary."* The only published one-acters of Mr. Gillette's are *The Red Owl* and *Among Thieves,* here printed for the first time. Both were very popular on the vaudeville stage for a number of years.

As a playwright Mr. Gillette has achieved distinction through an extraordinary ability to construct tense and moving dramas. *Secret Service* and *Held by the Enemy* are among the most successful Civil War plays this country has produced.

Following is a list of Mr. Gillette's published plays: *Held by the Enemy, Esmeralda, All the Comforts of Home, Secret Service, Sherlock Holmes, Too Much Johnson, Electricity, The Red Owl.*

CHARACTERS

JIM CONKLIN
NELL CONKLIN
BILLY BURNS

SCENE: *In Arizona.*

TIME: *The present.*

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AMONG THIEVES

SCENE: *In Arizona.* TIME: *The present.*

SCENE: *A weird looking sandy region in Arizona, with high set rocks on left side, to about centre, showing the plain with distant mountains etc. R. of this; and characteristic vegetation, such as cactus, etc.*

Entrances R. & L. and also up C. to L. behind rocks. Smaller pieces of prop. rocks etc. set about centre, and L. C. in front of large set piece, for characters to sit on. A few grass mats near rocks, but not too thick or green. Some tough looking bushes growing on set rocks above, as if one sitting below could be shaded from the sun when it is high.

Rugs and cushions of the ordinary faded kind are spread about; a few books and papers lying on the rocks, some picture postals of scenes in New York City, an old photograph between the leaves of a book where JIM *can find it, and other articles ad lib. that persons accustomed to sitting in that place every day might accumulate.*

It is late afternoon and the sunset lights are about beginning showing a little purple haze in distance, and later a touch of reddish light from R.

MUSIC: (*Weird—characteristic music before rise of curtain—which goes up as last strains fade wearily away.*)

(JIM CONKLIN *and* BILLY BURNS *discovered seated.* JIM *on a high backed chair near C.* BURNS *a little to L. of him on rocks—with high rocks back of him.* JIM *is a man of about forty years of age, very emaciated, and evidently in the second stage of tuberculosis. His face is pale and drawn, his hair sprinkled with grey, and his general appearance that of an invalid. It is not desirable, however, to make*

him look ghastly or deathlike, merely a man who is well started on the road to consumption. He has a shawl spread over his knees, and possibly one over his shoulders, though that is not necessary. BURNS *is a heavier built man, though he must be rather slim if possible, and his face has a pallor or whiteness which might be produced by white powder or something of that kind. Once or twice during early part of the act he coughs a little, and his manner as he sits talking with* JIM, *is that of a man somewhat weak and debilitated.* JIM *wears a dark soft hat.* BURNS *is bareheaded, his hat—a derby—lying on the rocks near him.*

During the whole scene, the two men as well as the woman, speak in an ordinary low tone of voice, hardly more than once rising above the normal. They are perfectly quiet, matter of fact, and take everything as it comes.

JIM *and* BURNS *are staring vacantly before them, and there's quite a pause before they speak.* JIM *is faced slightly to right of front—in a chair with a high back—but at opening he is not resting his head back against it.* BURNS *at left or L. C. is faced a little to left of front and is resting his head languidly back against rock or rest at back of him. Neither man changes his position for some time—until so directed.)*

(*A Pause after* RISE OF CURTAIN.)

BURNS (*L. C.—perfectly motionless.*) It's hell ain't it? (JIM *sits quiet, looking before him vacantly.*) (*Slight pause.*) But they don't git the count on us yet!

JIM (*motionless. No expression*). On me.

BURNS. On you nuthin'! Ye ain't barkin' fur a cent.

JIM. Come down. Ye don't need ter play none o' that.

BURNS. Play be damned. I bin watchin' ye ever sense I come. Yer all right. (*Slight pause.*) But we're up against it on the lay-out. (*With motion indicating the surrounding country.*) This [illegible] would kill snakes. (JIM *grunts affirmatively, without apparent interest.*) I spose wot we gits to the good is air.

JIM. Air hell! I'd ruther be in the rat hole under Mart's s'loon.

BURNS. Wat's that?

JIM. Our cyclone cellar—ware we makes a run wen it blows too hard.

BURNS (*languidly. Not raising head*). I ain't never slid fur that place. Under Mart's s'loon ye say? (JIM *nods.*) Rob Mart—South Street? (JIM *nods.*) Many o' the gang strike it?

JIM. That's the place ware ye'll find 'em—ef there's trouble.

BURNS. I'd like ter be there now instead o' this. Look at that cursed thing! (*Wearily motioning toward a high stalk cactus at right.*) They calls it a tree out here! Looks like a section o' drain-pipe stood up on end!

JIM. Can ye beat it?

BURNS. Not ef ye know wat's good fur ye! The bloody thing's full o' needles.

(*Slight pause.*)

JIM (*after slight pause.*) Say—wat's funny ter me is your gittin' 'ere.

BURNS. Wy not!

JIM. Not wy not—but wy! Two of us—both on the blink—both lungers by God, an' both turn up in this God-fursaken hole! How'd *you* strike it?

BURNS. Same as you mos' likely.

JIM. I was huntin' ur place that warn't on no map—they're lookin' fur me.

BURNS. Maybe ye're figurin' as you're the on'y one they're cappin'.

JIM (*after slight pause.*) Whadder they want you fur?

BURNS. Stokes Sloon racket. Me an' Slimey was in it.

JIM. Slimey Meech? (BURNS *nods.*) They'll never git him fur nothin'.

BURNS. Thas right—they won't—'cuz they got 'im now.

JIM (*turns with surprise.*) Wy Slimey had ther name o' bein' a eel!

BURNS. Ye kin sometimes ketch a eel can't ye?

JIM. Did 'e blow ther gaff on ye?

BURNS. Blow nothin'. 'E took it like a little man. (JIM *turns back front as before.*)

JIM. Whad they give 'im?

BURNS. Ten. Two off fur good.

JIM. Eight ain't so bad. I got a sentence o' death.

BURNS. Ye're lyin' like hell.

JIM. That's all right—ef it warn't fur Nell there. (*Slight motion toward up L.*)

BURNS. Nell! Wat ye botherin' yeself about her fur? Wat about them frens that sent ye out here? (JIM *turns and looks at* BURNS *peculiarly for an instant.*)

JIM (*after above business*). I got frens all right—that is, I got one.

BURNS (*raises head for the first time and looks at* JIM). One! (JIM *nods.*) Wat in ——e was ye blowin' me yisterday about a gang of 'em chippin' in?

JIM. That was yesterday.

BURNS. Christ Almighty—ain't it the same today?

JIM. Not so much.

BURNS. Wat's the matter with it?

JIM. Ye was just in then—how'd I know?

BURNS (*comprehending*). Ugh! (*A grunt only.*) (*Leans head back again against the rock.*)

JIM. Any plug can talk about jobs 'e was in 'n' then play it as low down as hell.

BURNS (*short grim laugh*). That's wat 'e can! (*Leans head back again.*)

JIM. But sense I've heard ye was workin' with the Macklin boys an' knows a lot o' my pals I'd like ter set ye straight—an' this is it.—It ain't any bunch o' the bunks as sent me out——

BURNS. No? (JIM *shakes his head.*)

JIM. It's juss one God A'mighty man as stood by me!

BURNS. That's downright neat. I s'pose I don't git his name.

JIM (*in doubt about telling*). Eh!

BURNS. Mebbe ye don't know me well enough fur that.

JIM (*after slight pause. Low voice*). His name's Tracy. (BURNS *raises head and looks at* JIM *in surprise an instant.*)

BURNS (*after above bus.*) Not Gus Tracy! (JIM *looking front, nods a little.*) No!—Not him!

JIM. All right, not then! Suit yerself.

BURNS. Wy I seen 'im three weeks ago!

JIM. You—you seen 'im!

BURNS. Sure!

JIM (*as if to rise.*) Ware was—wat did 'e—was 'e——

BURNS (*quieting* JIM *with a rough motion.*) Wat's eatin' ye! D'ye want to burst er blood vessel? (JIM *quiets down.*)

JIM. How was 'e lookin'?

BURNS. He didn't look no different.

JIM. Well can't ye tell me? Ye know it's this way—I ain't never seen 'im! (BURNS *is quite surprised.*)

BURNS. Ye ain't?—Ye ain't never seen the man wat sent ye out here?

JIM. I seen 'im with a mask on—that's all.

BURNS. Well I'm damned!

JIM. An' dead o' night at that! We was on a job back East.

BURNS. Oh—that was it. (JIM *nods.*) Must a' took this shine to ye on short notice.

JIM. Wal—— (*Slight pause.*) I done 'im a little turn.

BURNS. Did eh? (JIM *nods.*)

JIM. Not so much at that.

BURNS. Wat was the job?

JIM. Northampton.

BURNS. Bank?

JIM. That's it.

BURNS. Never heard you was into that!

JIM. No more did no one. Ye see him an Pete Scully was workin' into a Savin's Bank up there -an' the very day they was due ter crack it open Pete was took sick an' they sent me over.

BURNS. That same night?

JIM. Sure! I got in late at that - an' met Tracy at an ole

barn outside as directed. He 'ad 'is mask on and everythin' ready, an' give me a few d'rections—an' we sep'rated—fur I was due ter work on the outside. Ye knew about this job didn't ye?

BURNS. God—I should think so! Everybody knows Northampton!—But it was always s'posed Pete Scully was into it.

JIM. That's all right—but it was me did the job.

BURNS. How did ye do Tracy the turn?

JIM. Oh—it wasn't nuthin' at all—on'y as ye was askin' wy 'e's backin' me now, wy—that's it. Ye see we got away with the goods all right—but the watchman was onto us an' blazin' away with a big Colt—an' one slug creases Tracy in the side an' down 'e goes. I runs back ter pick 'im up—but the watchman's got there too—an' I has a little wrastle with 'im—but I finally knocks 'im foolish with a brick an' picks Tracy up an' drags 'im a mile or so to a house ware we has a farmer under pay. I took the night train myself an' ain't never run acrost 'im sense.

BURNS. He's treatin' ye square all the same!

JIM. Square! Wy damn 'im ye've no idea! It ain't the money an' all—but he never furgits, an' ev'ry week er so 'e's sendin' me some damn little stuff 'e picks up that keeps me from throwin' up my han's! Look at them picture cards o' the ole town! (*Taking up a hand full of postals of New York views.*) An' sometimes it's er box o' Huylers fur Nell—an' fancy stuff ter beat the band—an' here's a picture o' Nell wen she was dancin'—before she come with me. (*Holding up an old photograph.*) I dunno ware the hell 'e got it from but there it is! An wadder ye s'pose 'e's workin' at now?

BURNS. Wat?

JIM. Thur wuz an ole dog I come ter love awful—Ben was 'is name—'e ain't livin' now—but Rob Mart's got 'is collar framed up on the wall of 'is sloon. I s'pose 'e kinder blonged to Bob, but I was a hell of a sight fonder o' me than anyone, an' lately I got a kind o' yearnin' to git a holt o'

that ole collar o' his'n—them things brings dogs right back to ye don't they?

BURNS. Sure.

JIM. Sure they does.—So wen Tracy asks me in a letter ef thur wuz any ole thing I wanted I told 'im that there dog collar was just about my limit. An' here! (*Getting out a letter from a book.*) See wat 'e says back. This is the last I heard from 'im. Here—you read it—I don't see so well. (*Hands letter to* BURNS.) Read it out will ye—I always like ter hear 'em over again. (BURNS *rises and gets letter when* JIM *reaches it out to him.*)

BURNS (*reading.*) "Dear Conk. Don't make no mistake ye'll git the dog collar. I'll shake it down fur ye ef I has to break open Robbie's place an' blow the safe. Gus."

JIM. That's on'y fun ye know—about the safe—it's hangin' on the wall! (BURNS *hands letter back to* JIM.)

BURNS (*seating himself again L. C.*). Ye done 'im a good turn though—draggin' 'im ter that farmer's house. Was 'e all square?

JIM (*looking up suddenly.*) Who?

BURNS. The farmer.

JIM. Oh—yes. He couldn't blab—they put 'im in fur a share.

BURNS. Let you in too? (BURNS *asks questions languidly—head leaning back against rock.*)

JIM. Clean third! Tracy seen to that.

BURNS. I thought I heard thur was a lot o' the goods that couldn't pass.

JIM. Yes—but there's a reward, an' they'll slip it in yet.

BURNS. Got it safe I trust.

JIM. He's keepin' it.

BURNS. Got a place 'as 'e? (JIM *nods.*) Where was 'e wen 'e wrote ye that? (*Languidly indicating letter in* JIM'S *hand —without raising head or looking at him.*)

JIM. This? (BURNS *nods.*) Just across the river.

BURNS. Wich way?

JIM. Long Island City?

BURNS (*as if scarcely interested.*) Oh—that's ware 'e makes it.

JIM. Ye can't never spot his place?

BURNS. No!

JIM (*shakes his head.*) Drug store.—That is ye'd think so! But the basement is different.

BURNS (*raising his head and with sudden sharpness.*) Ye mean Lantry's?

JIM. How'd you—No! No such place as that!

BURNS (*quiet again now.*) Ye're lyin' it's Lantry's! Ye was off yer guard that time fur sure!

JIM. Off my—you—See here! Don't I know you all right?

BURNS. O' course ye do! I'm all right—an' you're all right—so wat are ye frothin' about! I was juss showin' ye how any man'll git off his guard!

JIM. I ain't wat I once was!

BURNS. The hell ye ain't! Ye're as good as ever! Look a' yer hand there! (*Reaching for* JIM'S *left hand which is resting on his knee.*) Stag the blood in it! (JIM *looks at his hand.*) Wen ye're a goner yer hand ain't that way! Not much it ain't! (*Rises and goes to* JIM *on his L.*) Gimme a look at the other!

(JIM *brings right hand up and holds it near his left.* BURNS *has them both in his left as if feeling of them, and while doing so suddenly slips a pair of handcuffs on and snaps them shut. Very slight pause*).

JIM (*looking up at* BURNS.) Wat's all this?

BURNS. Dead sorry Conklin ole man—but I've got to take ye East. (*There is a long pause.* JIM *sitting perfectly motionless and looking before him in a dazed sort of way.* BURNS *stands at first up in a slightly awkward manner as if not knowing what to do. Finally* BURNS *goes on.*) I don't like ter git ye this way—I tell ye that! I don't like it one little bit—but it was my on'y shot. (*Pause.* BURNS *moves down a little.*) I had to come out 'ere. I was ordered from Headquarters an' o' course I had ter play it the best I could! (BURNS *gets his hat and puts it on.*) (*Pause.* BURNS *turns toward* JIM.) Ye must o' known ye'd get it

some time so wat's the good o' takin' it ter heart? Ye couldn't be no worse off then ye are here now could ye? (*He goes a little nearer* JIM.) Ye can take yer time—I ain't goin' ter hurry ye none. We'll run everything easy, an' I'll look out that ye're kep comf'table. I know ye're a sick man—but we can't stop fur that—we can't if we'd want to! (*He moves a little to L. C. again uneasily, and is evidently very uncomfortable.*) God! Ef we stopped fur all the sick ones ware would we be!

(JIM *has been sitting motionless staring before him and continues to do so.* BURNS *moves up and during scene goes across up R. above* JIM.) (*Turns at up R. C. speaking front.*)

Ye'd orter know that I've got ter do wat I don't like in my business. You'd orter know that seein' wat ye've been through!—But I will say this here does cut me up some! (*He moves down R.*) It 's bein' so frenly with ye an' workin' in on yer feelin's that goes against me like this. It does fur sure. (*Pause.*) An' then I'm blamed if yer wife ain't been so cursed good ter me it makes me feel like a—— (*Slight pause.* BURNS *turns to* JIM.) See here, wen I see ye like this, I lose my nerve! (*Pause.* BURNS *suddenly goes to* JIM.) Ter hell with it! (*Quickly takes off the handcuffs.*) I'm damned if I do this—I don't care wat they say! There ye are old man! (*Moves back to R. C.*) I goes back alone, that's all!

JIM (*after long pause. Half to himself*) By God!—I must be near my death that ye could a' put it over me like this!

BURNS (*R. C.*). Wy not? It'ud 'a' gone with anyone.

JIM (*shakes head sadly.*) I'd 'a' spotted ye once! (*Turns to* BURNS.) How'd ye know all that about the—about the——

BURNS. D'ye think I come all thi way and not look up the boys?

JIM. But—them things about Slimey—an—an——

BURNS. Slimey! Don't ye spose we got him all right? Sure—we gathered in a lot o' that small truck—but it's the big

game I'm after! Gus Tracy's my man, an' you've done the trick for him! I'm lettin' ye go on that!

(JIM *suddenly looks at* BURNS *with a fearful dread.*)

JIM (*after long pause—stretching out hands towards* BURNS.—*Low voice.*) Put them things on will ye!

BURNS (*turning to* JIM *in surprise*). Eh!

JIM. Put 'em back on me!

BURNS. Wat fur?

JIM. I'm goin' with ye.

BURNS. The hell ye are!

JIM (*tremulously.*) I am—I tell ye I am—do ye hear—an' ye'll let Gus Tracy alone!

BURNS. Wat's eatin' ye?

JIM. Never mind!

BURNS. Ha! Ye make me laugh! (JIM *slowly lowers his hands. Eyes staring blankly.*) You'd be er nice sickly proposition fur me ter git out of all this—now wouldn't ye? Why all I want is Tracy! The big money's on him ye Guff!—Ye'd oughter be singin' a little hymn that I'm lettin' you alone—they'll make it hot fur me ef I tell 'em I had the nippers on an didn't git ye.

(JIM *looks at* BURNS *motionless an instant—in quick thought.*)

JIM (*slight change in his tone.*) They would eh!

BURNS. O' course they would!—But ye've treated me so cursed frien'ly here—an' then there's yer wife——

JIM. Yes—there's my wife.

BURNS. Damn me if I can stand fur it ter be so cursed mean!

JIM. Well ye're decent ter me all right—I allow that!

BURNS. Er it was anyone else ye'd be chained up in the baggage room by this time.

JIM. I guess that's so! (*He looks about, then he turns to* BURNS.) Any ways! done all I could to stop ye! I done all I could didn't I?

BURNS. Ye sure did.

JIM. I told ye ye'd rue me an' let up on Tracy—ye heard me say that!

BURNS. I heard ye all right.

JIM. An' o' course I know it's business with you—an' ye're attendin' to it straight—no one kin blame ye fur that!

BURNS. Now ye're spittin' out sense.

JIM. I s'pose it's money ef ye took me along.

BURNS. Five hundred.

JIM. Ye don't say!

BURNS. That's stood fur six months.

JIM. See here. Gim me yer hand! (*Reaching his hand to* BURNS.) Ye're treatin' me fine. I see that now.

BURNS (*shaking hands with* JIM). It's good-bye ter ye too. I'm leavin' on the 7.46.

JIM. Not tonight!

BURNS. Sure! Ye don't suppose I'm stayin' here! It's the train fur me—an' half an hour early at the station fur a wire ter the Chief. He'll have yer friend in before mornin' er I'm a liar.

JIM. That's quick work!

BURNS. Quick work is what we need. (*Moves toward up R.*) I've got ter git my grip at the s'loon.

JIM. Don't I see ye again?

BURNS (*stopping up R.*) Wat fur?

JIM. Ye might juss drop aroun' an' say goo'-bye.

BURNS. Yeh—an' I might juss not!

JIM. An' ef ye light out an' don't say nothin' ter Nell she'll git the idea there's somethin' wrong, an' I ain't goin' ter have her know!

BURNS. Well here—(*As if to start L.*) I'll stop in at your shanty as I —— (*Looking off up L.*) She's comin'! That's all right. (*Drops down R. a little.*)

(NELL *is seen entering up L. from above set rock bringing papers and magazines.*)

JIM (*quickly in low voice.*) Don't tell 'er nothin'! Leave it ter me!

BURNS (*low voice.*) Suit yourself!

JIM (*low voice.*) She don't need ter know!

BURNS (*low voice.*) Not from me!

(NELL *moves down on left side coming near* JIM.)

NELL. These papers have come, Jimmy—I'll stack 'em down here fur ye. (*Putting papers &c. among rocks L. of* JIM.) Well—how's everything?

JIM. He's just gittin' out.

NELL. Gittin' out! (*She looks at* BURNS *surprised.*)

BURNS. That's it.

NELL. Where?

JIM. East—on the 7.46.

NELL. Not really!

BURNS (*nods.*) I got sudden news.

NELL. But ye ain't fit ter go! I don't like ter see ye leavin' here an' yer cough so—so ——

BURNS. This place ain't no good fur me!

NELL. Well I'm sorry. I really am! It's Jimmy too.—Ye cheered 'im up a lot. He's a different man sense you come. Now 'e'll get that awful lonesomeness again.

BURNS. I hate like hell ter go—but biz is biz! An' also I wanter thank ye—ye've treated me fine—I will say that.

NELL. I was glad ter have ye 'round—we was both glad. Ye seem more like friends. Weren't we glad Jimmy?

JIM. O' course we was.—Wy don't ye put 'im up a snack o' somethin' ter eat fur tonight—ye know the kine o' supper 'e strikes at the Junction.

NELL. That's just what I'll do! (*As if to go.*)

BURNS. Thank ye, but I ain't got time ter wait.

NELL (*stepping.*) Now ye will take something—I won't be a minute! There's a half of a cold chicken just waitin' for ye.

BURNS. Well—thanks I'm sure. If it's anything to you I'll——

NELL (*breaking in.*) I don't want ye to starve do I? (*Starts to go up L. C. towards exit above rock.* JIM *quietly holds her by the dress in such a way that it is not seen by* BURNS. *She stops but does not give it away—quietly moving over and around to rocks &c. on left of* JIM.)

BURNS. I'll just go across to the s'loon an' git my grip. (*Turns and moves to R.*)

JIM. She'll have the grub 'ere ready fur ye.

BURNS (*R.*) See ye again. (*Exit at R.*)

JIM (*with slight wave of hand.*) Ta-ta.

(JIM *sits motionless.* NELL *watches till* BURNS *is out of hearing, and then turns to him.*)

NELL. What's the game?

JIM. Wat game?

NELL. Didn't ye have ahold o' my skirt?

JIM. Me?

NELL. I thought ye was tippin' me to wait.

JIM. Ye're dreamin'.

NELL (*glancing R.*) Well I better get a hustle on now—he's goin' up the steps at Barney's. (*Moving up L. C.*)

JIM. See here. (NELL *stops.*) There's that basket under the stairs—the one ye've got the eggs in. You know wat I mean.

NELL. What of it?

JIM. Let 'im 'ave 'is grub in it, that's all.

NELL. It's too big, Jimmy.

JIM. No matter—it'll keep the things from smashin' up.

NELL. I'm usin' it every day—I s'pose ye know that.

JIM. Well I want 'im to have it—it looks more horspitable—an' 'e's treated us good an' frenly.

NELL. O' course 'e has—an' I'm sorry he's gittin' out. I took quite a fancy to 'im myself. It ain't often ye see such—— Here! here! What am I doin'! (*Moving away.*)

JIM. Hold on! I want to tell ye——

NELL (*stops again.*) Well don't hold me up fur long!

JIM (*after a quick look front.*) Make it up nice fur 'im—nice an' gen'rous!

NELL. What else *would* I do?

JIM. Ye got some cakes an' things, ain't ye?

NELL. Um hm. (*Assent.*)

JIM. An' ye say there's some o' that chicken?

NELL. Sure.

JIM. An' chuck in a box o' sardines—I want ter treat 'im special.

NELL. Can't ye leave it ter me! (*As if to go.*)

JIM. O' course I can—but I was—wait a minute can't ye! (*She stops again.*) (*He motions her to come nearer.*) Here—I—— (NELL *moves to him.*) I was tryin' ter think o' some little thing as I could put in ter sort o' surprise 'im—he's been so frenly an' decent.

NELL. How surprise 'im?

JIM. Oh, some sort o' little trinket or remembrance like.

NELL. Ye ain't got anything here.

JIM. No—— (*Considering.*) There ain't nothin' 'e'd want—nothin' at all as I kin see. (*He appears to have a thought.*) Unless—unless it wuz that ole Colt's 45 o' mine—that's er sort of er relic ye know. (NELL *has been looking at him in astonishment since he spoke of the revolver.*) That little gun 'as been into some pretty close calls, eh? I guess I'll let 'im have it. It's there by the head o' my bed.

NELL. See 'ere, Jimmy—ye don't mean ye're goin' ter give that away!

JIM. Wy not ain't I?

NELL. We might need it!

JIM. Aw I dunno.—We're safe enough—an' I got a kine o' feelin' as 'e'd like ter have it ter remember us by.

NELL. Ye're crazy!

JIM. Ther' ain't no one huntin' us out in this 'ere sand hole, is there? We might as well be in Sahary. You put it in.

NELL. In what?

JIM. The basket of grub. Chuck it in with the other things.

NELL. D'ye want ter mash the whole layout?

JIM. Plant it under the stuff can't ye—it won't mash nothin' then.

NELL. But what are ye goin' ter——

JIM (*interrupting*). Now you do as I say!

(NELL *after an instant's hesitation turns and goes up Left toward entrance; she stops just before she reaches it.*)

NELL (*up stage*). Well—if ye're dead set ter put it in I'd better take the cartridges out!

JIM. Wat fur?

NELL. Ye don't want ter give it to 'im loaded, do ye?

JIM (*carelessly.*) Aw well—I might want ter show 'im it's workin' all right.

NELL. I thought ye was goin' ter surprise 'im.

JIM. I might at that.

NELL (*after an instant's pause.*) Oh well (*throwing up her hands a little*) have it yer own way! (*She exits at up L. above the rocks.*)

(*A long and silent pause.* JIM *sits motionless and waits.*)

(*Enter* BURNS *up R. carrying a good sized valise.*)

BURNS (*glancing about.*) Wal—wat about that grub? I don't see it anywares do I?

JIM. Give 'er a chance—she's on'y tryin' ter make it nice fur ye.

BURNS. I ain't got so much time my friend. I got ter git on the wire with that tip-off ter the Chief.

JIM. Wat's a minute ur two?

BURNS. Might be a lot.

JIM. 'S long as ye kin git yer clicker off before the train wat more der ye want?

BURNS. I want ter see that nobody gits ahead o' me with a timely warnin'—ye might understand that.

JIM. Warnin' how?

BURNS. Aw—never mind! I was keepin' my eye on ye juss the same.

JIM. On me?

BURNS (*nodding.*) Ye said it.

JIM. Waddid ye think I'd do?

BURNS. Not so much—but there's the missus—ye've had 'er talkin' 'ere. I seen ye stop 'er all right.

JIM. It was about that grub o' yours.

BURNS. That may be an' it may not! I ain't takin' so many chances. (*Crosses L. C. near rocks—carrying valise.*)

JIM. There ain't no chances in that.

BURNS (*L. C.*) Aw wal—I'm makin' quite sure she don't rush out o' yer shack at the hind end an' strike the telegraph ahead o' me. (*Sets valise on ground near him at L. C.*)

JIM. Ye're nervous ole man.

BURNS. That may be your idea.

JIM. We ain't goin' ter send no telegraph—nor anythin' else.

BURNS. I'm dead sure ye ain't.

JIM. I done all I could to stop ye didn't I—an' ye wouldn't have it!

BURNS. Not on yer life I wouldn't.

JIM. Wal—there ain't no good o' worryin' over wat can't be helped! Ye left me alone an' had pity on Nell there, instead o' draggin' us back fur one o' them damp an' gloomy prison cells, an' I consider ye done the square thing—an' we're both under obligations—an' if we kin show ye—— Here she is now! Ye wasn't kep' long was ye?

(BURNS *glances off up L.*)

(NELL *enters from behind rock piece up L. carrying a good sized basket. She crosses at back, coming down R. C.*)

NELL (*as she comes down.*) I'm sorry I wasn't 'ere as soon as you! Jim was so long tellin' me about cakes an' chicken an' things—— (*She starts across toward L. to give basket to* BURNS. JIM *has been reaching out his hand toward her for it during her speech, but she does not observe it.*)

JIM (*low voice as he reaches out to take the basket as she speaks above lines*). Here! (NELL *passes* JIM *toward L. and he reaches out to her as she passes.*) Here! (JIM *speaks these "heres" sotto voce—to* NELL *alone—but strong.*)

NELL (*continuation of her foregoing speech without regard to* JIM'S *low calls.*) that I had to rush it! (*Handing basket to* BURNS.)

JIM (*reaching out toward* NELL *with tremulous desperation just as she is giving the basket to* BURNS). Here! (*He settles back expressionless on failing to get what he wanted.*)

NELL (*continuation of speech. She is standing directly between* JIM *and* BURNS.) The things ain't done up very nice.

BURNS (*who looked at her closely as she spoke.*) Thanks ole lady. I know from the way ye speak as it's er true bill.

NELL. Sure—why not? (*She crosses back to R. C.*)

JIM (*C.*) Wat 'ave ye chucked in? (*Holding out hand to* BURNS *for basket.*) Less have a look.

BURNS (*L. C.*) (*Not giving basket.*) Wat ever it is it goes.

JIM. Is them seed cakes there?

NELL (*R. C.*) Well whadder ye think! Would I leave 'em out?

JIM. Ye might. (*Reaching hand out toward* BURNS *for the basket.*) Gimme a squint will ye!

BURNS. Whadder ye want? Cakes is it? I'll tell ye. (*Lifts paper &c. to look into basket.*)

JIM. Here—no!—let me—— (*Break.*)

BURNS (*glancing in.*) God yes! There's cakes ter burn!

JIM. But I mean them with the—Here!—Hand 'er over, can't ye!

BURNS (*handing* JIM *the basket.*) Ye're gettin' fussy as hell. (*Jokingly.*) Don't keep it ole man—will ye!

JIM (*taking the basket.*) Not long.

(JIM *opens the basket and looks in, soon pawing about a little.*)

NELL (*during above business.*) I got everything there Jim—what are ye jabbin' at it fur?

JIM. Yeh—I guess it—I guess it's all right enough. (*Takes out a little wad of newspaper.*) But this ain't the way ye—— (*Spills salt out of paper.*)

NELL. Here here! Ye've dumped that salt!

JIM. Good God, so I did! Hurry along an' git 'im another dose!

BURNS. I don't want no salt!

JIM. It won't take the tick of a clock.

NELL (*going.*) No it won't! Ye've gotter have salt for the chicken. (*Exit hurriedly up L.*)

(BURNS *moves to L. C. a little, watching* NELL *off.*)

BURNS (*coming down L. C.*). Come—hand it over! I'll go along by yer shanty an' meet 'er.

JIM. Ye won't mind waitin' er second will ye? (*Business with basket taking things out.*)

(BURNS *gives a quick look up L. C. to make sure that* NELL *is out of the way. Then turns to* JIM *with sudden anger—but keeps voice down.*)

BURNS. Waitin'! I was on'y lookin' fur this chance ter tell ye wat I think o' ye!

JIM (*business of taking out cakes and setting them down near him.*) Here's them cakes with the seeds all right.

BURNS (*enraged.*) Lunger ur no lunger, ye kin take this from me——

JIM (*bus. with basket.*)—An' here's some biscuits an' cheese.

BURNS. Yer a nice dirty dog to stand by a man—ain't ye!

JIM. An' this here—— (*Lifting up package in newspaper with left hand.*) muss be the chicken. (*Reaches in again with right hand.*)

BURNS. An' juss so ye'll know wat I mean I'm going ter show ye something! (*Drops down as if to open valise.*)

JIM (*covering* BURNS *with revolver in right hand inside the basket*). An' juss so ye'll know what *I* mean I'm goin' ter show YOU something!

BURNS (*on knee, looking up at* JIM.) Eh!

JIM. Stand up!

BURNS. Wat's that?

JIM. Stand up ye dirty skunk!

BURNS (*rising.*) Whadder ye mean?

JIM (*covering* BURNS *with revolver in right hand, basket dropping from his knee and rolling away on the ground.*) Ye know wat ye git don't ye!

BURNS. Wat I git!

JIM. There ain't no more chance fur ye than er rat goin' over the falls! They kin do wat they God damn please ter me—but I'll see you in hell before ye git Gus Tracy not ef I swing fur it from now till the end o' time! Ye coulda't say nothin' ur do nothin'—I wouldn't trust ye ef ye went on yer knees before God A'mighty! An' the on'y reason I'm givin' ye this talk instead o' blowin' the bloody lights out o' ye is to see ef ye want any word sent any wheres—ye might have

er wife ur a kid—an' ef ye speak quick I'll do all I kin before they run me in fur killin' ye!

BURNS. Now don't be too hasty with that gun o' yours. We're both in wrong!

JIM. I don't wait fur no guff like that!

BURNS. Ye'll wait fur this all right—fur I'm tellin' ye the whole blame thing's a cursed joke!

JIM. Git ready!

BURNS. That's wat it is! I ain't a spotter at all ole man—I'm one o' the boys—an' all I ask is a chance to show ye.

JIM. Show hell!

BURNS. Ef ye plug me now ye'll kill yerself wen ye git on ter wat ye've done.

JIM. Ye're a liar.

BURNS. That's straight—an' I kin make good!

JIM. You don't git away on that!

BURNS. I don't have to git away!—I got somethin' here in this grip that—— (*About to stoop and open valise.*)

JIM. Hold on! (BURNS *straightens up.*) That don't go!

BURNS (*kicking valise over to* JIM.) Then you do it!

JIM. That don't go neither. I tell ye to git ready—an' it's the lass time.

BURNS. Ef ye don't gimme some kind o' show ye're a dirty coward! My name's Tracy!

JIM. Ye're lyin' like hell!

BURNS. I'm thinkin' ye won't take no chances on that lie!

JIM. I—there ain't no—I don't give a—— (*Slight pause.*)

(*Enter* NELL *up L. She comes down R. C. and stops, looking at the two men.*)

NELL. Ye've got 'im covered Jimmy!

JIM. Git away from 'ere!

NELL. What fur? (*Pause.*) What's doin' anyhow?

JIM. Git away quick or ye'll see somethin' as won't agree with ye.

NELL. What is it—ain't ye goin' ter tell me?

JIM. Leave it ter me an' git out.

NELL (*to* BURNS.) What ye been doin'? He don't hold people up fur nothin'.

JIM (*to* NELL—*but not taking eyes off* BURNS.) You don't need ter butt in!

BURNS. I was playin' a joke—an' he don't give me no chance ter square myself.

NELL (*to* BURNS.) What chance d'ye want?

BURNS. Open that grip an' ye'll see.

NELL (*to* JIM.) What's the harm—ye've got 'im right ain't ye?

JIM (*after a pause.*) Go on.

(NELL *quickly drops down and opens valise.*)

NELL (*looks at contents.*) What is it? I don't see nothin' special.

BURNS. That thing on top. (*Slight tendency to move.*)

JIM (*to* BURNS.) Stay still!

(NELL *takes out a package done up in brown paper.*)

NELL (*looking at the package in her hands.*) What's this writin' on it? (*She looks closely and reads aloud—with a little difficulty in making it out.*) "I shook it down fur ye Conk ole boy an' the joke's on you you crazy loon." (*She looks up at* BURNS *motionless for an instant. Then suddenly tears the paper off* [*it must come off quickly*] *and finds a dog-collar in her hands.*) Why look 'ere! (*Holding it up.*) Would ye believe it—it's old Ben's collar! (JIM *rises slowly to his feet and after he is well up the revolver falls out of his hand, and he sinks back in a faint.*) (*Running to* JIM.) Jimmy! (*She is on* JIM's *right.*)

BURNS (*hurrying to* JIM). Here! (*He is on* JIM's *left.*)

NELL. He's down an' out!

(*She feels his hands and other business. They put him in a comfortable position.*)

BURNS. Wait a minute! (*Gets flask out of valise and they try to give him some of the contents. As they work at him.*) It ain't nothin' but a faint.

NELL (*as they work at him.*) Well what about it?—He ain't faintin' fur fun is he?

BURNS. He'll be O. K. before ye know it.—There! He's comin' around all right.

NELL. Ye must uv played it on 'im pretty strong.

BURNS. Yes I did.

NELL. De ye think ye'd orter 'a' done it to a sick man like him ef it was on'y a joke?

BURNS. Mebbe not ole lady—but it warn't so much of a joke as ye might think. I bin puttin' it up fur Jim here, an' sendin' 'im out watever I could,—an' bein' along this way I thought I'd juss see fur meself ef he was the kind of a guy as was worth it.

NELL. Well—ye seen all right.

BURNS. I did sure. (*Business with* JIM.) Here 'e comes! —I told ye 'e'd be all right. (JIM *revives a little.*)

NELL. It was some kind of er joke ye said?

BURNS. Uh ha. (*Assents.*)

NELL. Do I hear it?

BURNS. I'm Gus Tracy, that's all.

(NELL *looks at him an instant before speaking.*)

NELL. Ye *are!*

BURNS (*nods once or twice before speaking.*) I was out on a job in 'Frisco an' come back around this way ter see how 'e was.

NELL (*after looking at him sharply an instant.*) I guess that's right.

(*They turn to* JIM *who is trying to speak—his eyes on the dog-collar lying on his knees.*)

JIM (*weakly.*) (*Trying to point to it.*)—Ye got that dog collar, didn't ye?

BURNS. It's here all right.

JIM. Gimme yer hand.

BURNS. Sure. (*They clasp hands.*)

CURTAIN

THE CORSICAN LIEUTENANT

BY

ROBERT HOUSUM

ROBERT HOUSUM

Robert Housum was born at Cleveland in 1886. He was graduated from Yale in 1908 and received his M. A. degree at the same University three years later. From the time of his graduation until 1914 he was engaged in newspaper work in his native city. He was associated with the *News* and the *Leader*, of which last he was successively Financial and Dramatic Editor.

He is the author of a number of plays, including *The Gypsy Trail, Sylvia Runs Away, Winding Stairs, Persons Unknown, Pokey,* and (in collaboration with Martin Brown) *A Very Good Young Man.*

Published plays: *The Gypsy Trail; Sylvia Runs Away; The Corsican Lieutenant.*

CHARACTERS

Lieutenant Buonaparte	*Of the Régiment La Fère*
Captain Le Boutillier	
Monseigneur de Tardivon, *Abbé de Saint-Ruf*	*Gentlemen of Valence*
Garempel de Bressieux	
Bachasson de Montalivet	
Jean, *a servant*	
Two footmen	
Désirée	
Madame Grégoire du Colombier	*Ladies of Valence*
Caroline du Colombier	
Madame de Laurencins	
Lauberie de Saint-Germain	

Place: *Valence, France.*

Time: *May, 1786.*

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THE CORSICAN LIEUTENANT

A corner of the park surrounding MADAME GRÉGOIRE DU COLOMBIER'S *residence at Valence, late in a May afternoon of the year 1786. On the left, one wall of the house is visible —a simple Romanesque building of stucco, roofed with reddish-brown tile. The entrance-door, plain and level with the ground, stands open.*

A wall of gray stone, three feet high and overgrown with vines, extends across the extreme rear of the stage and out of sight to the left. Behind it, a little terrace, built level with the top of the wall, overlooks the rugged, broken valley of the Rhône. A little to the left of center, four or five broad stone steps lead from the ground to the terrace.

Cutting off the upper right-hand corner of the stage and joining the low wall at an obtuse angle, a little to the right of center, is a much higher wall of the same gray stone, extending to down-right corner. It is pierced in the center by gates of iron grill-work, which stand open.

In the down-right corner stands an old, gnarled cherry-tree with spreading branches. A stone seat, placed against its trunk, faces down left. Cypress trees stand at the juncture of the two walls, and at either end of the terrace. Against the low stone wall, well to the left, stands a small garden-table.

At the rise of the curtain MADAME DU COLOMBIER *is standing in front of the house, chatting with her friend,* MADAME DE LAURENCINS. MADAME DU COLOMBIER *is a handsome matron of forty-five.* MADAME DE LAURENCINS *is an elderly woman with white hair, but a shrewd, lively manner. A little to the side stands* LAUBERIE DE SAINT-GERMAIN, *a charming,*

vivacious, dark girl, full of mischief, talking to BACHASSON DE MONTALIVET, *an attractive young man with a winning but rather reserved manner. The servant,* JEAN, *in livery, stands at the entrance-gate at the right.*

As the curtain rises the ABBÉ DE SAINT-RUFF *enters through the gate right. He is an old man, slender and distinguished in his ecclesiastical robes, with a delicate, parchment-like face.*

JEAN (*announcing him*). Monseigneur de Tardivon, Abbé de Saint-Ruff. (*The hum of conversation stops as the* ABBÉ *enters.* MADAME DU COLOMBIER *advances to meet him.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. My dear Abbé, this is charming of you. You distinguish my little gatherings beyond their poor deserts, when you allow them to draw you from your studies.

ABBÉ. Madame du Colombier, the proper study of mankind is man. And if *he* is worthy of our study, then why not his more spiritual partner—woman? (*With a smile he waves his hand toward* BACHASSON, *who is devoting himself to* LAUBERIE.) Bachasson, as you see, agrees with me. (*To* MADAME DE LAURENCINS.) My dear Madame de Laurencins.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS (*giving him her hand*). My dear old friend.

ABBÉ (*approaching* LAUBERIE *and* BACHASSON). What have I been hearing? Has my little Lauberie so soon become a woman—and that rogue Bachasson a man? (LAUBERIE *and* BACHASSON *are confused.*) Ah, the years skim swiftly over the bowed heads of the old, but sometimes, from the glowing eyes of the young, our own youth peeps out at us. (*Taking a hand of each.*) Dear children, it is so with me to-day. Bachasson, suffer an old man who assisted at her first communion—— (*He kisses* LAUBERIE *on the forehead.*)

BACHASSON. And who will assist, I hope, Monseigneur, at her wedding.

ABBÉ. 'Tis a pleasure I should be loath to deny myself. (*He places* LAUBERIE'S *hand in that of* BACHASSON.) There, Lau-

berie, I confide him to your care. The influence of a good woman is more powerful than that of any priest.

BACHASSON. Monseigneur, as always, you are right.

ABBÉ (*turning to* MADAME DU COLOMBIER). But your daughter, Madame du Colombier? I thought she had returned from her visit to the convent?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Lauberie, my dear, where *is* Caroline?

LAUBERIE (*looking off left*). I do not see her. But Monsieur de Bressieux is yonder by the pool, and I would hazard a guess Caroline is not far off.

ABBÉ (*shaking his head*). Ah, youth, youth! Then that, too, is a match?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Yes, it was my late husband's dearest wish.

LAUBERIE. I will tell her you are here. (*She goes out left, with an inviting glance at* BACHASSON. *He starts to follow her, but the* ABBÉ *detains him by the arm.*)

ABBÉ. All goes well at home, Bachasson?

BACHASSON (*puzzled, but obviously eager to follow* LAUBERIE). Yes, Monseigneur. I—I——

ABBÉ. And your charming mother?

BACHASSON. In excellent health, Monseigneur. With your permission——

ABBÉ (*still detaining him*). Your father is at court, they tell me—— (LAUBERIE *returns to see why* BACHASSON *has not followed her. The* ABBÉ *sees her, and, with a chuckle, releases* BACHASSON.) Go, Bachasson. I am a tedious old man. But for this brief moment of Purgatory you shall have—— (*With a smile for* LAUBERIE)—an hour of Paradise. Go, my son. (BACHASSON *and* LAUBERIE *go out left amid laughter.*)

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Monseigneur, you spoil your flock.

ABBÉ. Tut, tut. Only he who loves his lambs is fit to be a shepherd. (CAROLINE DU COLOMBIER *comes in left, followed by* GAREMPEL DE BRESSILUX. *She is a tall, stately blond;*

GAREMPEL, *a man of thirty-five, of distinguished appearance and an air of experience.*)

CAROLINE (*advancing to the* ABBÉ). My father, this is kind of you.

GAREMPEL. Monseigneur.

ABBÉ. Monsieur de Bressieux.

CAROLINE. I know you come for news of the Convent and the Sister Superior. But you will hear it better from Désirée.

ABBÉ. Désirée? Désirée?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Caroline's little friend, whom she brought home from the convent for a visit.

CAROLINE. A charming child.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. She has won *my* heart. A dancing ray of southern sunshine.

ABBÉ. Ah, that reminds me. Have you seen anything, Madame, of *my* young protégé?

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Who is that?

ABBÉ. My little Corsican. What is his name? Buona-Buona——

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. You mean little Lieutenant Buonaparte? (*General laughter.* LAUBERIE *and* BACHASSON *return from left.*) We are expecting him to-day.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Dear Abbé, where did you discover such an odd-looking object?

ABBÉ. He bore letters from my good friends, the Marbœufs. The young man called upon me, and, I am bound to say, impressed me not unfavorably. Ambitious, studious and old beyond his tender years.

LAUBERIE. Yes, Monseigneur, there you are right. He thinks himself already a man.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Dear Abbé, you are incorrigible—you and your protégés. The lad is a boor.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Nay, Jeannette, you are too harsh. He is young, far from home, and, I fear, unhappy. I have really an affection for the poor lad.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Who is he?

ABBÉ. A Corsican, Madame, and, like all Corsicans, poor.

Of the nobility, it is true, but something down at heel. I daresay his manners are rugged, and he would, of course, be shy of the young ladies.

LAUBERIE. Heaven's mercy, shy! He declared his love for me within the hour of our meeting.

BACHASSON. That child?

LAUBERIE (*her eyes twinkling*). Even so, Monsieur. You have a rival.

GAREMPEL (*jestingly*). I am at your service, Bachasson, if it come to a duel. (*More laughter.*)

CAROLINE. Guard your own, Monsieur. Lieutenant Buonaparte has also declared himself a suitor for *my* hand.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. What a Don Juan! I profess, I fear for myself—a lone, unprotected widow.

(*At this moment a large St. Bernard dog rushes on from left.* DÉSIRÉE *has him on a leash, but he is pulling her after him. She comes on laughing, her hair fallen about her face, scolding the dog.*)

DÉSIRÉE. Stop, Leo! Stop, you scamp! You are running away with me! (*The* ABBÉ *steps forward in the dog's path, as the others dodge out of the way.*) Stop him, Monsieur! Stop him! Catch him round the collar! (*The* ABBÉ *seizes him by the collar and brings him to a stop.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. My child!

CAROLINE. Désirée!

BACHASSON (*rushing to the* ABBÉ). Monseigneur, are you shaken? (*He takes the leash from* DÉSIRÉE.)

DÉSIRÉE. Oh! My father! I crave your pardon. I did not know——

ABBÉ. Tut, tut. What am I for, if those in trouble cannot call upon me?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Wicked Leo! I trust, Monseigneur, you are not hurt?

ABBÉ. By old Leo? (*He pats the dog.*) You trust me, Madame, to fight the devil, yet tremble when a puppy paws me.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Garempel, will you take him to

Fernand? (GAREMPEL *takes the leash from* BACHASSON *and leads the dog off left.*) Désirée, what *have* you been doing, child? Your hair—— (MADAME DU COLOMBIER *arranges her hair.*)

DÉSIRÉE. We've been romping on the lawn—Leo and I. Back and forth we chased each other—and, oh, I am so warm. But when I tried to take him back to Fernand, he caught sight of Caroline—one dash he made for her—nothing could stop him—nothing but Monseigneur. (*She curtsies to the* ABBÉ.)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. This is our little Désirée, of whom we told you.

ABBÉ. Leo has already made us acquainted. If you are fond of dogs——

DÉSIRÉE. I love them—big, clumsy darlings!

ABBÉ. Then Caroline must bring you to see me and my Russian wolf-hound.

DÉSIRÉE. Oh, how kind.

ABBÉ. You are happy at the Convent of the Sacred Heart?

DÉSIRÉE. Yes. I am so fond of Sister Benedicta. There is no one quite like her.

ABBÉ. I knew the Sister Superior—many years ago. It is as you say.

GAREMPEL (*returning from left*). No doubt, Désirée, you have chosen for your patron St. Bernard.

ABBÉ. Or St. Francis of Assisi, who loved animals.

DÉSIRÉE. No. I have chosen no *saint* for my patron.

ABBÉ. Not a saint? Whom then? Speak, my child.

DÉSIRÉE. One, Monseigneur, of whom Sister Benedicta has told me much. One whom I loved as soon as I learned of her simple life and noble deeds. One for whom I feel a near sympathy, for I, too, like her, love France—but with a love, alas, much weaker. I mean Jeanne d'Arc.

ABBÉ. The Maid of Orleans.

DÉSIRÉE. You are not angry?

ABBÉ. No, my child, no. You may yet live to see the name of Jeanne d'Arc in the calendar of saints. Meanwhile, my

dear, emulate her piety, her fearlessness, her purity. No better model could serve a maid of France. You will not be called upon, like Jeanne, to fight for your country. Yet do not think your love for France will be wasted. Mutterings of discontent are heard on all sides, and it may be that ere long France will need all the love her children can give her.

DÉSIRÉE. It is so that Sister Benedicta speaks.

ABBÉ. I have never had a compliment I value more.

JEAN (*at the gate right, announcing him*). Captain Le Boutillier. (LE BOUTILLIER *comes in right, a handsome, military fop, with superb carriage. He advances to* MADAME DU COLOMBIER *with a bow.*)

LE BOUTILLIER. Madame du Colombier, I kiss your hand. (*He does so.*) A thousand pardons for my unfortunate delay. Monseigneur, your very humble servant. (*To* CAROLINE.) Mademoiselle Caroline, with Monsieur de Bressieux's permission, I rejoice in your return to Valence. I assure you, the poor hearts of all our regiment were desolated at your absence, and Mademoiselle Lauberie— (*He turns to* LAUBERIE)—who alone might have cheered us, was otherwise, and—(*with a sigh*)—I daresay, better employed, Monsieur de Montalivet.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. You are late indeed, sir. Fie! A soldier should be prompt.

LE BOUTILLIER. Forgive my delay, and in exchange I will relate a story.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. A bargain!

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Do you know, Captain, if Lieutenant Buonaparte, of your regiment, is to make one of us?

LE BOUTILLIER. Why, it is young Buonaparte whom my story concerns. And I can assure you he is coming.

LAUBERIE. But the story, Captain?

LE BOUTILLIER. I must first explain that on my way here I stopped—to see a lady.

LAUBERIE. Oh, Captain, that is not gallant.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Wretch!

LE BOUTILLIER. Do not accuse me of infidelity. It was only

my poor old laundress, Mademoiselle Bou. (*There is laughter at this information.*) Now you must know that Mademoiselle Bou has a lodger.

LAUBERIE. In that wretched hovel? Impossible.

LE BOUTILLIER. By no means. Her lodger is none other than young Buonaparte.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. I might have guessed it from his looks.

ABBÉ (*in protest*). My dear Madame!

LE BOUTILLIER. Now while the good Mademoiselle is wrapping up my linen, I am suddenly aware of a great to-do in the garret overhead. I listen in astonishment—and what is my surprise to find our little Buonaparte stamping about and declaiming a speech, as if to get it by heart.

LAUBERIE. Oh, what was it?

CAROLINE. Do tell us.

LAUBERIE. Could you hear what he said?

LE BOUTILLIER. I could not help it. He shouted in a voice of thunder and gabbled away in his villainous Italian-French until the building shook. Wait. It was something like this. (*He strikes an attitude in imitation of Buonaparte, exaggerating grossly his Italian accent.*) "Madame, I come to propose an alliance, which, while it may at first inspire surprise, will, I am convinced, result in the mutual happiness of both contracting parties." (*Laughter follows the imitation from all but the* ABBÉ.)

LAUBERIE (*with an hysterical laugh*). He said that to *me*.

LE BOUTILLIER (*continuing, with an extravagant gesture*). "My sword is at my side, and with it I will go far."

CAROLINE. He said *that* to *me*.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. The lad is poor, no doubt, and must make a prudent marriage.

ABBÉ. Poor indeed, Madame, and with many brothers and sisters—in want.

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. But the object of his affection—who is she?

LE BOUTILLIER. That is the cream of the jest. But you shall guess—a lady of this company.

LAUBERIE. I am sure it is I.

CAROLINE. Oh, no, my dear Lauberie, I think it must be I.

GAREMPEL. Bachasson, we are jilted for a beggarly lieutenant.

LE BOUTILLIER. Young ladies, you are both wrong. While I tremble at Buonaparte's audacity, I cannot but applaud his taste. The lady to whom he would offer heart and hand is no other than our charming hostess. (*A loud burst of laughter follows this announcement.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. I? That child? Why, he is younger than Caroline.

BACHASSON (*to* GAREMPEL). Permit me to offer my felicitations, my dear Garempel, on your prospective step-father-in-law.

GAREMPEL. The young puppy needs a caning and I am of a mind to give it him.

ABBÉ. Let me beg you not to fight this young man.

GAREMPEL. A duel? Certainly not. But I should like to box his ears.

ABBÉ. A duel would surely result. He is proud as Lucifer.

GAREMPEL. Monseigneur, for myself and friends I pledge my word that no trouble shall arise.

ABBÉ. I rest very much your debtor.

CAROLINE. Alas, Désirée, and this is the young man I had selected for your cavalier.

DÉSIRÉE. No adventurer shall wear my favor.

LE BOUTILLIER. And may we inquire, Mademoiselle, who is to have that high privilege?

LAUBERIE (*clapping her hands*). Désirée shall bestow her favor on one of the gentlemen.

DÉSIRÉE (*laughing*). I have no favor. My flowers—they are lost.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Come, Désirée, you must not be shy. Bestow your favor prettily on your chosen knight.

CAROLINE. On the one you love best.

DÉSIRÉE. Very well. But what shall it be? Ah! I know—cherries!

(*She goes swiftly to the cherry-tree and starts to climb it. The* ABBÉ *and the other gentlemen laugh heartily, but the ladies, scandalized, rush to stop her. Two* FOOTMEN *in livery come out of the door of the house, the first carrying a punch-bowl, the second a tray of glasses. These they place upon the small garden-table against the low stone wall. The second* FOOTMAN *then returns to the house, while the first fills the glasses, and then stands beside the table.*)

LAUBERIE. My dear!

CAROLINE. Désirée!

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. Dear little rogue!

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Little tomboy! And in company! What will the Abbé think?

ABBÉ. Ah, I too could climb trees once upon a time.

DÉSIRÉE. But my cherries?

LE BOUTILLIER (*coming forward*). If you will allow me, Mademoiselle——

(*He lifts her easily in his arms and holds her up while she gathers some cherries, then sets her down again upon the ground.*)

DÉSIRÉE. Thank you, Monsieur.

CAROLINE. Now, Désirée, to the one you love best!

(*The three young men, amused, line up in a row. The* ABBÉ *stands at the extreme left.*)

DÉSIRÉE (*passing before them*). It is not you — (*to* BACHASSON). Nor you— (*to* GAREMPEL). Nor you, Monsieur, for all your kindness— (*to* LE BOUTILLIER). They are for Monseigneur. (*She holds out her cherries to the* ABBÉ, *who takes them.*)

ABBÉ. My dear, I am deeply touched.

(*A string quartet, off left in the garden, begins to play a stately minuet.*)

Gentlemen, I ask leave to toast my little lady. (*Giving his hand to* DÉSIRÉE, *the* ABBÉ *leads her up the steps to the terrace. The* FOOTMAN *comes forward with the tray of*

glasses and serves them all. They crowd about the foot of the steps, laughing and chattering.) I have no crown to offer you, my child, but accept these earrings, of Nature's own design. (*The* ABBÉ *hangs upon her ears double-stems of cherries.*)

LE BOUTILLIER (*raising his glass*). To Désirée!

THE OTHERS. To Désirée! (*They all drink. The music off left comes to an end.*)

JEAN (*at the gate right, announcing him*). Lieutenant Buonaparte.

(*All turn and see* BUONAPARTE *standing in the gateway. He is short and lank and his hair, long and ill-kempt, straggles over his forehead. His uniform is too large for him and fits wretchedly. His sword is too long for him, and he manages it awkwardly. His thin legs are encased in huge, flapping military boots, battered and covered with mud. He keeps his hat on, and after a moment's pause advances to* MADAME DU COLOMBIER *with a stiff, awkward gait, and makes her a stiff bow.*)

BUONAPARTE (*with a noticeable Italian accent*). Madame, I greet you.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Lieutenant, I am glad to welcome you. We did but await your arrival to begin our dance.

(*The young people whisper and laugh among themselves, obviously at* BUONAPARTE.)

BUONAPARTE. I knew you would be eagerly awaiting my arrival. But military duties, Madame, of supreme importance have occupied my time. Captain! (*He salutes* LE BOUTILLIER, *who acknowledges it negligently.*) Gentlemen! (*A stiff bow.*) Ladies! (*Another stiff bow. Then, as the* ABBÉ *and* DÉSIRÉE *come forward.*) How does my good friend the Abbé?

ABBÉ. Excellently, my son. Désirée, may I present my young friend, Lieutenant Buonaparte?

BUONAPARTE (*nodding carelessly to* DÉSIRÉE). Ah, little one. (*To the* ABBÉ.) In Corsica children are kept in the nursery —where they belong.

ABBÉ (*annoyed, but trying to cover the slight*). Your *History of Corsica*—how does it come on?

BUONAPARTE. Ah, I am making progress. It will soon be finished.

GAREMPEL. You are, then, an author as well as a soldier?

BUONAPARTE. Yes.

GAREMPEL. As Corsica is now a part of France, I should think that a separate history of that bleak island would be superfluous.

BUONAPARTE. A part of France? Yes, thanks to the treachery of your countrymen.

ABBÉ. I thought your father had been instrumental in that affair.

BUONAPARTE (*passionately*). He *was!* He turned against the patriot Paoli—he served France against his native land. I will never forgive him.

ABBÉ (*tactfully*). A great man, this Paoli of yours—a true patriot, who fights for the freedom of his country.

BUONAPARTE. A great man, truly. I should much like to emulate him.

DÉSIRÉE. Then you, too, love your country?

BUONAPARTE. As only an exile can love. I have had to leave my home, my family—oh, when I think of Corsica ground beneath the heel of France, I could die for her.

LE BOUTILLIER. Yet as a French soldier——

BUONAPARTE (*bitterly*). I *hate* France!

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Come, it grows late. Shall we not walk our minuet?

BUONAPARTE. Madame du Colombier, I have to talk over with you a matter of grave importance. I should like private speech with you. (*A shout of laughter follows this speech.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Later, Buonaparte, later, if you wish it. Now for our dance. (*She signals off left and the quartet again begins to play a minuet.*) Gentlemen, choose your partners.

(GAREMPEL *takes* CAROLINE *off left,* LE BOUTILLIER *takes*

MADAME DE LAURENCINS; BACHASSON *approaches* LAUBERIE *but* BUONAPARTE *steps rudely in front of him.*)

BUONAPARTE. Come, Mademoiselle Lauberie, I will dance with you.

LAUBERIE. But I am going to dance with Monsieur de Montalivet.

BACHASSON. I have asked Mademoiselle Lauberie——

BUONAPARTE. I asked you first. Never mind him. Come along. (*He jostles* BACHASSON *out of the way and marches* LAUBERIE *off under his very nose, to* LAUBERIE'S *great indignation.* BACHASSON *starts forward, but the* ABBÉ *restrains him, and points to* DÉSIRÉE. BACHASSON *takes her off. The* FOOTMAN *carries the tray of glasses into the house.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. What *am* I to do with him? I cannot manage him.

ABBÉ. You can give him a hint to come no more.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Hints? He never sees them.

ABBÉ. Surely he will not dare propose to you?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. He will dare do whatever comes into his head. But come, let us watch the dancing.

(*They start off left, but meet* LAUBERIE *coming back. She is angry, her dress torn and muddy, and she holds up a piece of torn lace.* BUONAPARTE *stalks after her, mortified but sullen.*)

LAUBERIE. I will dance with you no longer. You should not try to dance when you are so awkward—so careless. See! My dress is ruined. Your clumsy boots have gone right through it.

(*The* ABBÉ, *shaking his head and holding up his hands at this new catastrophe, hastens out left.*)

BUONAPARTE. Bah! Here is a fuss over nothing. Rip off this lace stuff and it will do well enough.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. An accident, Lauberie? Oh, what a shame! The pretty frock. Here, dear, let me—— (*With pins she aids* LAUBERIE *to repair the damage.*)

BUONAPARTE. There! No harm done.

LAUBERIE. No harm! Oh!

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Buonaparte, you should be more careful. The pretty dress is sadly torn.

BUONAPARTE. Good God! Have I not apologized? Would you have me on my knees over a bit of cambric? There, Mademoiselle, I am sorry. We shall do better next time.

LAUBERIE. Next time! I will not dance with you again. I am not so greatly impressed with your sword that I wish to feel it whacking against me all through the minuet. If you were less occupied in admiring yourself in your uniform, you might keep your clumsy boots off my dress.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Lauberie, *dear!*

BUONAPARTE. Silence!

(*By this time the music off left has stopped and the three couples stroll on from left.*)

But why should I care? She is only a sulky child.

BACHASSON (*starting forward*). Lieutenant Buonaparte!

LAUBERIE. And you are nothing but a Puss in Boots.

(*A roar of laughter greets this sally.* BUONAPARTE *is furious but masters his anger.*)

BUONAPARTE. Mademoiselle, I do ill to lose my temper over such foolishness. I will overlook your rudeness.

LAUBERIE. *You* will overlook it! (*She makes him a contemptuous curtsey.*) I thank you, Lieutenant, for your condescension.

BUONAPARTE (*the sarcasm lost on him*). Good! (*He turns to* MADAME DU COLOMBIER.) Here, Madame, is our little difficulty well ended. Again I ask you for a private interview.

(*The music begins again off left.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. There is not time. Listen! The dance is beginning. (*She beckons the others and goes out left.*)

BUONAPARTE (*turning to* LAUBERIE). We shall do better this time, Mademoiselle Lauberie.

BACHASSON (*aside*). Mademoiselle de Saint Germain is en-

gaged to me for the minuet. (*He and* LAUBERIE *go out left together.*)

BUONAPARTE. Then Mademoiselle Caroline?

CAROLINE. The Captain has preceded you, Lieutenant. (*She and* LE BOUTILLIER *go out left together.*)

BUONAPARTE (*approaching* MADAME DE LAURENCINS). Madame, if one of your advanced years can support the fatigue of another dance——

MADAME DE LAURENCINS. What! My advanced years! Good heavens! (*She goes angrily out left, followed by* GAREMPEL.)

DÉSIRÉE (*approaching* BUONAPARTE *timidly*). Monsieur! Monsieur! (BUONAPARTE *turns round.*) *I* will dance with you.

BUONAPARTE (*rudely*). I do not care to dance. I have something better to do than dance with children.

(*Hurt by his rudeness,* DÉSIRÉE *goes out left.* BUONAPARTE *stalks moodily across the stage, and meets* JEAN, *who has come from his station at the gate to remove the punch-bowl. He snuffers as he passes* BUONAPARTE, *who turns sharply upon him.*)

What is that?

JEAN (*laughing*). Puss in Boots!

(BUONAPARTE *takes one step toward him, seizes him by the collar and almost jerks him off his feet.* JEAN *is terrified.*)

BUONAPARTE. One word more of your impudence and I'll break your neck.

JEAN. Oh, Monsieur—Lieutenant—in the name of God, let me go. I did not mean it—I will never do so again——

BUONAPARTE (*flinging* JEAN *from him*). Slave!

(MADAME DU COLOMBIER *comes in from the left.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Jean, you are needed within. Why —what is this?

BUONAPARTE. Your servant has been insolent. But I think it will not happen again.

(MADAME DU COLOMBIER *makes a gesture of despair.*

JEAN *picks up the punch-bowl and goes hastily with it into the house.* MADAME DU COLOMBIER *starts to follow him.*)

BUONAPARTE. Madame du Colombier, a word with you.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Later, Buonaparte, later. I have much to do——

BUONAPARTE (*sternly, following and seizing her by the wrist.*) Now!

(*She submits and with great formality he leads her to the bench beneath the tree, where she seats herself. He makes her a profound bow.*)

Madame, I come to propose an alliance which, while it may at first inspire surprise, will, I am convinced, result in the happiness of both contracting parties.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER (*repressing a strong inclination to laugh*). Of what sort of an alliance do you speak?

BUONAPARTE. An alliance of marriage. I have the honor, Madame, of offering you, together with my deep devotion, my hand and my name. (*He makes another stiff bow.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. But, my dear lad——

BUONAPARTE. You, Madame, have wealth, influence and beauty—I have ambition and extraordinary talent—say rather, genius. Who can say how high such an alliance will carry us?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. But Buonaparte, this is too absurd—— (*She bursts out laughing. The music stops off left.*)

BUONAPARTE. Madame, it is not politic of you to scorn me. My sword is at my side, and with it I will go far.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. My dear boy, do you know my age?

BUONAPARTE. I never thought of it. You are, I suppose, thirty.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. I am old enough to be your mother! When you marry, you should choose a young and pretty girl.

BUONAPARTE. Madame, I assure you that you are by no means a bad-looking woman.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER (*gratefully*). Thank you for the compliment. Now let us drop the matter.

BUONAPARTE. You mean that you refuse me?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Most certainly.

BUONAPARTE (*turning, and walking away to the left*). You have wounded me deeply.

MADAME DU COLOMBIER (*almost tenderly, following him*). Dear lad, think of it no more. It is only a case of puppy-love. Very young men are always infatuated with older women.

BUONAPARTE. What! You think I am in love with you?

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. Are you not?

BUONAPARTE (*scornfully*). What a notion! I must marry to advance my career, and an alliance with you might have done so. But that is all. I respect you, Madame, but I do not love you. (*He turns on his heel and walks off left.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. What a boy!

(JEAN *appears in the doorway of the house, carrying a small basket; and having first assured himself that* BUONAPARTE *is no longer there, he comes forward.*)

What is it, Jean?

JEAN. I have come to gather fresh cherries, Madame, for the little collation.

(DÉSIRÉE *comes on from the left.*)

MADAME DU COLOMBIER. That is well. The Abbé is so fond of them. (*She goes left, passing* DÉSIRÉE *and caressing her as she does so, and disappears into the house.*)

DÉSIRÉE. Where are you going, Jean?

JEAN. To gather cherries, Mademoiselle Désirée.

DÉSIRÉE. Oh, let *me* do it, Jean.

JEAN. You cannot reach them.

DÉSIRÉE. I can climb, can I not? Please! No one is looking, and you must be tired.

JEAN. That is true, Mademoiselle. I *am* fatigued. My duties are so arduous.

DÉSIRÉE. Come, then—help me up.

(*With his hands* JEAN *makes a stirrup for her foot; lifts her up and she scrambles into the cherry-tree. He lays his basket on the ground beneath it.*)

JEAN. Do not fall. Madame would be furious with me.

DÉSIRÉE. I? Not likely. Do not wait, Jean. I will bring them in.

(JEAN *goes left into the house. As he does so* LE BOUTILLIER *and* BACHASSON *come in together from left.* DÉSIRÉE *sees them and conceals herself in the branches.*)

LE BOUTILLIER. An excellent plan. I will join you with pleasure. Monsieur de Bressieux goes with us?

BACHASSON. The idea was his.

LE BOUTILLIER. Then shall we say on Thursday?

(BUONAPARTE *strolls in from the left, but seeing the two men in conversation, hesitates, not wishing to intrude, and starts up the steps to the terrace.*)

BACHASSON. Admirable. We shall count on you. (*Then, seeing* BUONAPARTE, *he lowers his voice.*) Captain, should we not include young Buonaparte?

LE BOUTILLIER. He's an ill-tempered youngster. Still—if you wish—yes—why not?

BACHASSON. Lieutenant Buonaparte!

(BUONAPARTE *turns, bows and approaches.*)

BUONAPARTE. Monsieur de Montalivet.

BACHASSON. We are to take a little excursion on Thursday to the Inn of The Golden Oak. We shall drive the ladies over and dine there. Will you do us the honor of making one of us?

BUONAPARTE (*touched by* BACHASSON'S *friendly manner*). Monsieur, it will give me great pleasure. I thank you for the invitation to your dinner.

LE BOUTILLIER. Oh, it's not de Montalivet's dinner.

BACHASSON. Each gentleman is to invite a lady.

LE BOUTILLIER. You must be sure to come, Buonaparte. They give you an excellent dinner—and only two louis.

BUONAPARTE (*clapping his hands to his pocket*). Two louis! I regret, gentlemen, that, on consideration, I must decline. I am on duty Thursday evening.

LE BOUTILLIER. Nonsense, Buonaparte. I can get you off.

BUONAPARTE. It is impossible.

LE BOUTILLIER. Why?

BUONAPARTE. I cannot go.

LE BOUTILLIER. But why not?

BUONAPARTE. Well, then, if you must know, I—do not wish to go.

LE BOUTILLIER. Perhaps you do not like our company?

BUONAPARTE. I have told you why. Let that suffice.

LE BOUTILLIER. You are very particular for a beggarly lieutenant.

BUONAPARTE (*with a snarl, his hand on his sword*). Take care, Le Boutillier.

BACHASSON. Stop! (*He draws* LE BOUTILLIER *aside.*) Can't you see the reason? Leave him to me. (*He turns to* BUONAPARTE *and draws him aside.*) Buonaparte, it is well known that France is none too generous to those who place their swords at her disposal. Will you do me the honor of accepting from me, as from a friend, a trifling loan?

BUONAPARTE. I am no beggar, Monsieur.

BACHASSON. I am sorry. (*He returns to* LE BOUTILLIER.) I can do nothing with him.

(GAREMPEL *comes in angrily from left and goes to* BUONAPARTE.)

GAREMPEL. I do not wish to quarrel with you, but, before these gentlemen, I tell you this absurd talk of marriage with Madame du Colombier must stop.

BUONAPARTE. Do not interfere in my affairs, Monsieur.

LE BOUTILLIER (*roaring with laughter*). What! Did he really do it? Upon my soul, this is a jest indeed.

BUONAPARTE. Who told him of it?

LE BOUTILLIER. We all knew it.

GAREMPEL. You are a laughing-stock. Le Boutillier told us of your absurd intention this afternoon.

BUONAPARTE. What did you tell them?

LE BOUTILLIER. Faith, Buonaparte, 'twas too droll. There were you in your room bawling out— (*He burlesques him to his face.*) "My sword is at my side, and with it I will go

far." And here was I, bursting with laughter, directly below you.

BUONAPARTE. Eavesdropper! Spy!!

GAREMPEL. The Captain is quite a mimic. He gave us the whole comedy.

BUONAPARTE (*tugging at his sword*). Draw your sword, Le Boutillier!

LE BOUTILLIER. I am not going to fight you, you little fool.

BUONAPARTE (*slapping* LE BOUTILLIER). Now will you fight?

(BACHASSON *attempts to restrain* LE BOUTILLIER.)

LE BOUTILLIER. Hands off, de Montalivet. I'll not take a blow.

GAREMPEL. Gentlemen! In our hostess' very garden!

LE BOUTILLIER (*struggling with* BACHASSON). I'll not take a blow.

GAREMPEL. Captain Le Boutillier, I have pledged my word to the Abbé that we will not fight this boy.

BUONAPARTE (*dashing at* LE BOUTILLIER). He *shall* fight.

GAREMPEL (*catching* BUONAPARTE'S *arms behind his back and restraining him*). Stop, you little spit-fire.

(BUONAPARTE *breaks loose and slaps him.*)

Our word is pledged to the Abbé not to meet you. If you persist in insulting us under these circumstances, you are a coward.

(BUONAPARTE *calms down at once.*)

LE BOUTILLIER. You are right. I lost my temper. But a blow!

BUONAPARTE (*his lip trembling*). You are a pack of cowards. What can I do, if you will not fight me?

BACHASSON. Buonaparte—I beg of you—I am sorry——

BUONAPARTE. You, too, are one of them. You, too, laughed at this jackanapes. Will you meet me?

BACHASSON. No, Monsieur. Our word is pledged.

BUONAPARTE. Cowards! Cowards! All of you—cowards!!!

GAREMPEL. Come, let us leave this *gentleman.*

(*They go out left.* BUONAPARTE *watches them defiantly until they have disappeared, then throws himself on the*

bench in a paroxysm of angry weeping. DÉSIRÉE *appears in the cherry-tree looking down at him.*)

BUONAPARTE. They laugh at me. Oh, I cannot bear that, I cannot bear it. Everyone scorns me—because I am poor and young. Better death than such a life. (*He draws a dagger from beneath his coat.*) When they find me lying here, ah, then they will know that they lacked appreciation of a noble soul. (*He looks curiously at the dagger a moment. A thrill of horror passes over him and he closes his eyes. Then he regains control of himself.*) Farewell, Corsica! (*He lifts the dagger.* DÉSIRÉE, *who has been watching him with alarm, flings a cherry which hits him in the face.*)

BUONAPARTE (*dropping his arm and starting up*). What was that? Who was that? (*He looks up and sees* DÉSIRÉE *in the tree.*) What are you doing there?

DÉSIRÉE. Gathering cherries. Hold out your hat, Monsieur, I am going to throw them down to you. (*In astonishment* BUONAPARTE *holds out his hat, into which she throws a quantity of cherries.*) Now help me down. (BUONAPARTE *holds out his arms and she jumps into them from a low branch, then to the ground. Then very seriously.*) Come, Monsieur, give me the dagger.

BUONAPARTE. You have been spying upon me.

DÉSIRÉE. No. I have been up there a long time. I saw the quarrel—and what came after. Give me the dagger.

BUONAPARTE (*concealing it*). No.

DÉSIRÉE. Oh, you will not do this. You *must* not. Why, why should you commit so great a sin?

BUONAPARTE (*more kindly*). Run along, Mademoiselle. And do me the kindness to say nothing of this. You do not understand. You are a child.

DÉSIRÉE. It is true that I am young. But because you are scorned for your youth, will you scorn me also? I want to help you. Do not do this—oh, I plead with you.

BUONAPARTE. What is life worth to me? I am the laughing-stock of everyone. You saw how those scoundrels made game

of me. What a position for a man of feeling! I cannot bear it. Death is preferable.

DÉSIRÉE. No—No.

BUONAPARTE. Everyone—everything—is against me. The scorn of lackeys—the butt of those accurséd girls——

DÉSIRÉE. But you are so rude to those who would be your friends. There is Bachasson—dear, generous fellow—why could you not accept his loan? He meant it kindly.

BUONAPARTE. My mother has already too many burdens. I must not increase them by expenses beyond my means.

DÉSIRÉE. Then if not for your own, live for your country's sake.

BUONAPARTE (*with deep feeling*). Do not speak of Corsica. Its day of glory is done. The primitive simplicity that once existed in that stern island is giving way to the despicable luxury of the French. (*With a sob.*) Ah, dear Corsica!

DÉSIRÉE. You are homesick?

BUONAPARTE. Yes. No one cares for me here. Oh, if I could only see my own little grotto at Milelli—my mother—and little Paulette.

DÉSIRÉE. You have sisters?

BUONAPARTE. Yes, we are a large family—all scattered now.

DÉSIRÉE. You miss them?

BUONAPARTE. Yes.

DÉSIRÉE. I want to be your friend. Will you not think of me as your little sister?

BUONAPARTE. You do not, then, hate me?

DÉSIRÉE. No. I like you. What is your Christian name?

BUONAPARTE. Napoleon. That is always the name of the second son in our family.

DÉSIRÉE. Then I shall call you Napoleon. For my sake will you not give up these miserable thoughts? Would you refuse little Paulette if she pleaded with you?

BUONAPARTE. You do not understand. I am not a man who can be happy in a subordinate position. My talents have no opportunity. Yet I know I have great abilities. I might be a great leader—like Cæsar or Alexander.

DÉSIRÉE. Then prove it.

BUONAPARTE. You are laughing at me? No, no, you do not ridicule me, you like me.

DÉSIRÉE. Yes, I like you.

(BUONAPARTE *puts her hand with rough tenderness. The sun is beginning to sink over the Rhône.*)

BUONAPARTE. Oh, that I lived in some happier age! Among the ancients—there were my true place. There is an antique strain in me. I am not at home amid the luxury and frivolity of to-day. Not now the age of the Spartan mothers who bade their sons go forth to conquer for their country's sake—or die.

DÉSIRÉE. Oh, you are wrong, Napoleon. Patriotism still beats high in women's hearts. Look at me—only a little convent maid—yet for France,—ah, what would I not do! Dear, sunny land of gaiety, beneath thy light laughter wells a deep fount of patriotism and sacrifice. Very well can I understand those Spartan mothers—even, perhaps—ah, I do not know—might bring myself to imitate them.

BUONAPARTE. You *do* understand!

DÉSIRÉE. You would do much for your loved Corsica?

BUONAPARTE. If but a single life lay in the way of her release, I would bury the blade of the avenger deep in the tyrant's heart—and then die happy—for Corsica.

DÉSIRÉE. Oh, live for Corsica, Napoleon, it is so much nobler—and so much harder.

BUONAPARTE. Alas, what can *I* do?

DÉSIRÉE. What can you *not* do. You are conscious of great thoughts, great ambitions. It may be you are chosen of God to save your country. And in a moment of weakness would you cast these gifts away? It is not so my brother must talk.

BUONAPARTE. Désirée! You give me new courage.

DÉSIRÉE. Be sure that God has not given you talent only to waste it. Be strong. Be brave. And be patient. I believe in you, Napoleon.

BUONAPARTE. *I will!*

DÉSIRÉE (*leading him up to the terrace. The sunset is red in the distance*). Look! Out there, beyond this quiet garden, lies the world. Do you not see its spires and citadels glowing golden in the sunset? So have all the heroes seen it, when, young and untried, they stood hesitating on the threshold of their lives, with the light of a great ambition flooding their souls. Go forth and conquer—it is yours for you to take. There is one, at least, who believes in you already. And so long as there burns in your heart the love of your country, your way will be illumined. You have seen the vision. Oh, realize it!

BUONAPARTE (*almost in a frenzy*). The world beyond! To grasp it and make it mine!

DÉSIRÉE. But there must be no more weakness, no more childish despair. My conqueror must not yield to a coward's fear. Give me the dagger.

(BUONAPARTE *gives it to her.*)

Do you see that star just over the horizon? It peeps out now from masses of heavy clouds, but soon it will rise above them and mount the heavens. Well, I name that your star —Napoleon's star.

BUONAPARTE. My star! My destiny!

DÉSIRÉE. You will not forget my words?

BUONAPARTE. Never, Désirée—nor you. At last I see my destiny. You have shown it to me.

DÉSIRÉE (*leaving him standing there, she goes and picks up her basket of cherries*). Good-bye.

(*He does not answer her, gazing into the sunset. She walks left into the house. At the door she turns and looks back at him, but he does not see her. She goes into the house. He still stands looking out, his figure silhouetted against the setting sun.*)

BUONAPARTE. The world! Mine!!

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

ON THE RACECOURSE

BY

LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY

LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY

Lady Augusta Gregory was born at Roxborough, Ireland, in 1859. She became a dramatist in order to furnish the Abbey Theater in Dublin with plays of a light character. There were few such works available, and though Lady Gregory's first dramatic idea came to her as a serious play, she determined to try the theme in the vein of comedy.

Lady Gregory has written a number of plays, mostly one-act comedies, which are without doubt among the very finest specimens of pure comedy that have been written in modern times. She perhaps more closely approaches the spirit of Molière than any other dramatist now writing in the English language.

Lady Gregory was one of the founders of the Abbey Theater, through which the modern Irish dramatic movement was enabled to come into being.

Published plays: *Spreading the News; Kincora; The White Cockade; Hyacinth Halvey; The Gaol Gate; The Canavans; The Jackdaw; The Rising of the Moon; Dervorgilla; The Workhouse Ward; The Image; The Travelling Man; The Full Moon; Coats; The Deliverer; Mac Darragh's Wife; The Bogie Men; Damer's Gold; The Golden Apple; The Dragon; Aristotle's Bellows; The Jester; The Wrens; Shanwalla; Hanrahan's Oath; The Story Brought by Brigit; On the Racecourse.*

CHARACTERS

MICHELIN, *a good-looking and good-humored young fellow in poor fisherman's clothes.*

JULIA, *his wife, young and comely, but with a discontented expression. Poorly dressed.*

STIVE ROLAND, *large, red-haired, not very robust. Tidily dressed in cheap ready-made town clothes.*

A few people pass on and off occasionally.

SCENE: *The edge of a field.*

TIME: *The present.*

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ON THE RACECOURSE

The scene is the edge of a field, a little wall or hedge at the back.

MICHELIN *and* JULIA *come on. They are carrying canvas, a tambourine, a stool, some boards and trestles.* JULIA *sits down on the ground.* MICHELIN *begins setting up a little table with the boards, whistling as he does so.*

MICHELIN (*putting up a screen of canvas at the side of his table*). Here now is a little place fit to shelter the Queens of Germany and of Spain through the whole gamut of the year!

JULIA. There'd have been as good shelter under any old gallows of the far-away times, would be standing up against the sky on the bare blasted side of a hill.

MICHELIN. The sun will be apt to be beaming out ere noon and putting the chill of the mists to rout.

JULIA. Ah, the sun has Ireland forgot this good while. There's a winterish appearance on the grass. As the Scripture says, you hardly know the summer to be in it unless by the leaves of the tree.

MICHELIN. To gather up fire and sticks and to kindle them at the fall of night we'll have all the comforts of the world.

JULIA. Sure there's nothing to boil for the supper unless a pot of green nettles the young turkeys would run from, it not

NOTE. This is a rewriting of my first play, that was called "Twenty-Five" and was about a country boy who saved his old sweetheart from being evicted by losing "up to fifty pounds" to her husband at cards. It was given by our Irish players in Dublin and London and was liked, but it was rather sentimental and weak in construction and I did not publish it with my other plays. I thought I had laid its ghost in *The Jackdaw*, where a brother saves his sister from bankruptcy but without romance or sentiment. But a ghost will not always be obedient and I hope this appearance of a revenant may be forgiven. A. G.

having a tint of meal to thicken it, and they to be dancing with the hunger.

MICHELIN. Here now is a small bit of a loaf was hid and concealed in the sack since the day of the sports at Moycullen.

JULIA. Green mold growing out from it like you'd see upon a graveyard wall. (*Throws it away.*) My grief not to have waited on my luck when I got the chance of it, and famine and starvation would not have come anear me.

MICHELIN. It is on Steve Roland your mind is dwelling. If I never seen him itself, I'll not give in he to be a better man than what I am.

JULIA. That's a friend I lost in earnest. It was bred in him by good blood to think more of me than what you do, and to have more love for me as well.

MICHELIN. It is to himself I suppose you would wish to be giving the treasure from the Wild Bird's Nest that is in your song. (*Sings.*)

"Oh, I will climb a high, high tree,
And rob a wild bird's nest,
And back I'll bring whatever I do find
To the arms that I love best," she said,
"To the arms that I love best!"

JULIA. It is in my own arms I'll keep anything I'll find, never fear.

MICHELIN. The duck to learn you its swim you might chance to reach to him yet, and you wishful to give me back my brass ring.

JULIA. If it was but a ring of rushes, I have respect for the marriage rite. I am no tinker's woman to be marketed from hand to hand, if it was for all the treasures of the Eastern World.

MICHELIN. I suppose he should have a valiant lot of money by this.

JULIA. Why wouldn't he, and he these three years or more out in England?

MICHELIN. Hundreds of pounds?

JULIA. Maybe so. Or thousands.

MICHELIN. He could build a house with that much to the stars, till he'd be giving out newses of Heaven.

JULIA. If we had but a little ass to go carrying our lumber along from place to place, and a basket with tapes and needles and pins and hair-oil, to traffic and to make our living. (*She takes a little mirror from her dress and shakes out her hair.*)

MICHELIN. It is carring along branchy avenues with white Arabians you should be, and a golden crownet on your head.

JULIA. Ah, be quiet. The time we are fasting is no time to go funning, and the time we are left bare naked.

MICHELIN. If the boat was drowned, and the nets were swept, I have skill in my hands and in my wits will bring in a fortune yet. I am not without a thought there will some good thing turn to me upon the wind this day.

JULIA. It is the wind is all our estate indeed, and our farm the Shuler's road.

MICHELIN (*still arranging cards and roulette board, etc., on his table*). To knock knowledge out of cards, or to set out a thimble on this board is under my hand, there is no better man in Ireland. Wait now till you'll see— (*He puts a shade over one eye, and on his head an old-fashioned hat with grey locks of hair hanging from inside it.*) The lads will think to best me now, but I'll show them the old one-eyed man is a tradesman cannot be bet! (*He sings.*)

O list to the strains of a poor Irish harper,
And scorn not the strings of his old withered hand!
Remember his fingers could once move more sharper
To raise up the strains of his dear native land!

Now Julia, let you put up your hair, and the comb in it, the way you will shine out good.

JULIA (*putting up her hair*). Why would I go shine out good? What at all will any person think of me, being mixed and mingled with the like of *that* of an old warrior?

MICHELIN. Aged and youthful—that's the way we'll suit all sides. Sound out now a ballad, woman, till it will bring some lads to this corner of the course.

JULIA. Ah, where's the use. It is far we are from the people and from the throng.

MICHELIN. Go on to the brink of them so, where you might gather some little profit. (*She takes up a little tambourine and goes off.*) I'll rise a verse myself to entice them. The Lord send a fool in my way and I'll be a whole gentleman! (*Looks out at the side, then sits down and sings.*)

Oh, who is this poor foreigner that's lately come to town?
And like a ghost that cannot rest, still wanders up and down;
A poor unhappy Sassanach, if more you wish to know,
His heart is breaking all for love of Irish Molly-O!

(STEVE ROLAND *comes in.*)

MICHELIN (*rattling his dice*). Come on, my noble sportsman, speculation is the life of trade! As low as a penny, as high as a pound! No deception whatsoever, a fair game and a fair amusement. Steeple-chasing and horseracing without the aid of whip or spur!

STEVE. Ah, I'm in no humor for games or gambling.

MICHELIN. What is it ails you?

STEVE (*sitting down and beginning to unlace his boots, sings*).

There is a rose in Ireland, I thought it would be mine,
But now that she is lost to me I must forever pine.
Till death it comes to comfort me, for to the grave I'll go,
And all for loving of my dear, my Irish colleen, O!

MICHELIN. Indeed! there would seem to be trouble on you.

STEVE. To go looking for treasure out in England I did, and to come back looking for treasure.

MICHELIN. It is likely you gained it out in England?

STEVE. A share, a small share. But to earn it in that place you earn trouble along with it.

MICHELIN. Is that so now?

STEVE. The [illegible] back of the streets show out

so ugly or so hard till I felt the sods under my feet to-day, and the salt of the bay in my mouth. (*He shakes dust from his boots and rubs them.*)

MICHELIN. It is likely it is beef and mutton you do be getting the fill of your mouth of in those parts.

STEVE. Hard work, terrible hard work. Take it or leave it, sick or sorry. No holy days and no relief. (*He begins putting on his boots again.*)

MICHELIN. To keep a roof over your head you have means to do, would be a fitting place to shelter a wife?

STEVE. It is that kept me in the factories. That thought was a candle through the years, that never wasted or was spent.

MICHELIN. Fashions and boots and inside wear, and to be dressed out like citizens. That is the most thing a woman does be coveting after.

STEVE. That might be so with some.

MICHELIN. It is the one way with the whole of them.

STEVE. It was not so with her I went working for, and that I came back looking for.

MICHELIN. Is that so?

STEVE. That is a woman would be merry in the heart, being nourished with cresses from the stream, and having no home through the storms of the year but the sheltery side of a bush.

MICHELIN. She should be a world's wonder.

STEVE. Singing the same as a singing-bird she would be, and the mountains to be falling on her head.

MICHELIN. I have a wife myself can gather the people around her in flocks and in droves.

STEVE. There is no person but would stand without shoes, in three feet of frost and of snow, to listen to the clear sweet voice of her.

MICHELIN. My own woman that has a voice as strong as a counsellor. The wind to be set in the right quarter you would hear her as far as Belmullet.

STEVE. It is often the salmon in the stream at Kilcolgan would gather for to listen to her song.

MICHELIN. At Kilcolgan?

STEVE. That is where she had her dwelling.

MICHELIN. And in what place is she now?

STEVE. The deer knows more than I know. Some other man has her in his keeping.

MICHELIN. And is it to come back looking for her you did?

STEVE. I did so. I went up the little path, thinking to see her sitting on the bank, reading her little Rosary book and dandelions having roses on them around her feet.

MICHELIN. And she wasn't in it?

STEVE. To wed with some man having a boat she did, and nets. Some man from Barna or from Ballinderreen. Better means he has than myself, that has but seven sovereigns in my bag. (*Takes a little bag from his pocket and shows it.*) That was to bring her back along with me to the town of Manchester.

MICHELIN. Boats and nets are a slippery unsteady estate.

STEVE. It was a great deception. It did a great wrong on me bringing me ploughing back across land and sea.

MICHELIN. So you will be going back without her?

STEVE. I don't know. The smell of the sea and the sounds of the race-course. . . . It is likely you yourself have a better life than mine.

MICHELIN. Ah, it is but a hungry way of living.

STEVE. I nearly think I'd have more comfort in the mind to join a rambling gang and to go rambling wild than to have a fixed home or a trade. Look now at the youth on your own brow. There is no one rightly young only those that will travel.

MICHELIN (*standing up straight and taking off shade and hat*). Sure this is but the appearance I put on myself for fair days and the like at the time I am following my trade. (*Puts them on hastily again.*) Whisht now—here is herself is coming.

STEVE (*looking out where he points and then going over to the other side of the mouth*). Herself—herself. Is it *your* wife she is?

JULIA (*coming on*). Did you gain nothing yet?

MICHELIN. Sure the day didn't hardly begin up to this. Wait a while and I'll have silver will fill out the creases of your skirt!

JULIA. If all the promises you give would but hold I'd be wed with a shipful of money in place of a mountain of misery.

MICHELIN. Can't you speak graceful, and there being in the place a high-up man out from England.

STEVE (*keeping a little apart and speaking with a disguised voice*). It's a fine day for the races.

JULIA. It is fine for everyone but ourselves.

STEVE. Indeed it's not everyone the sun does be shining on. (JULIA *looks at him closely.*)

MICHELIN. There is a knot of people near. Sound out now a ballad till we'll bring them hither that they may take their chance in the game. Let you give them the Wild Bird's Nest. (*Stands up and calls out.*) Come now, lords and ladies, put the ball where you like, where you fancy. You play and I pay. The feather wins and badly backed!

(*Three or four people come on and play while* JULIA *sings, looking outwards.*)

JULIA.

"Oh, I'll not sit on the grass," she said,
Nor be a love of thine,
For I hear you love a Connacht maid
And your heart is no longer mine," she said,
"And your heart is no longer mine!"

"Oh, I'll not heed what an old man says,
Whose days are nearly done,
And I'll not heed what a young man says,
For he's fair for many a one," she said,
"For he's fair for many a one!

"Oh, I will climb a high, high tree,
And rob a wild bird's nest.
And back I'll bring whatever I do find

To the arms that I love best," she said,
"To the arms that I love best!"

(She flings out her arms and clasps them to herself as if holding something. As she pushes, the gamesters hear the bell and cries, and run off shouting.)

MICHELIN. Nothing won from that crowd, only a handful of coppers! (*Counts them.*)

STEVE. It is a kind woman you are, ma'am, of a young woman to have wed with so ancient a man.

JULIA. Ancient is it?

MICHELIN. Eighty-three years the Saint Martin's that's coming! I remember the time the herrings went out of the bay and clouds of misfortune came upon Ireland.

STEVE. Four legs, two legs, three legs. Crippled and bent as he is, I suppose it is hardly he can walk with a crutch.

JULIA. Not at all, not at all.

MICHELIN. No, but two crutches. Bet up entirely in the bones.

STEVE. It should be a lonesome thing for a comely woman to be going with a blind man.

JULIA. Are you taking him to be blind?

MICHELIN. From my birth up; from my birth up. Mostly dark I am, and defeated in the sight.

STEVE. Old people do be contrairy in the hours of the day and snoring the same as a herd of pigs through the night time.

MICHELIN. Indeed there's not much thought of old people by a good deal of youngsters.

JULIA. No one ever saw me would think I would wed with any but a straight upstanding man.

MICHELIN. On and on sickly I do be. I am at some times as deaf as a drum.

JULIA. Stop lying now! (*She tries to take off his hat, but he shields himself with his arm.*)

MICHELIN. It is herself is the kind woman indeed. She could have joined with a handsome lad, having on him a head of yellow hair.

STEVE. Is that so? Yellow hair? (*Puts his hand uncertainly to his head.*)

MICHELIN. You wouldn't be tired listening to her telling out about him. As straight as in the line army! A true fowler with his gun. He never saw the snipe rising but he'd knock it.

JULIA. Stop your talk!

MICHELIN. The way she has him pictured out you'd say him to be the son of a King, by a Queen.

STEVE. Where at all did she meet with such a one?

JULIA. Stop your humbugging talk, Michelin; you're entirely too supple with the tongue.

MICHELIN. And the riches he made out in England! There isn't hardly figures enough to count them in arithmetic.

STEVE. I never heard of such a one at all.

MICHELIN. Steve I believe is the name he had; Steve Roland.

STEVE. Roland! And she made him out so wealthy?

MICHELIN. A room full of gold in his house. Two laborers stripped of their clothes turning it over with forks.

STEVE. She said him to have gold and means?

MICHELIN. She could have had square diamonds on her hands and a lady's way of life. Starvation and misery with myself she chose, and he having full bags of coin.

JULIA. You have too much chat!

MICHELIN. Let you go sing again, Julia. Draw down on them some of the old troubles of Ireland, that might make them turn to the cards or the dice.

(JULIA *goes to the side again and looks through her sheaf of ballads.*)

STEVE (*to* MICHELIN). Rich she said. To have gold she said? Well, she to have said so, it is so. I didn't tell you that I am a rich man myself! (*He takes out his little bag as* JULIA *prepares to sing.*)

MICHELIN. Come on so, sir, take a turn at the board! (*Calls out.*) Sing out strong, Julia, we have the half of the day wasted! Nominate your color, sir, while the ball is rolling! Thank you, sir, and the black wins again. The lucky black

—one down, two down; any more or any other! Off she goes again! (*They go on playing while* JULIA *sings at the side with her back to them.*)

JULIA.

Righ Shamus he has gone to France and left his crown behind,
Bad luck be theirs both night and day put running in his mind.
Lord Lucan followed after him with his slashers brave and true,
And now the doleful keen goes up. What will poor Ireland do?
What will poor Ireland do? What can poor Ireland do?
Our luck they say has gone to France, then what can Ireland do?

Oh, black's your heart, Clan Oliver, and colder than the clay,
Oh, high's your heart, Clan Sassanach, since Sarsfield's gone away!
It's little love you bear to us for sake of long ago,
But hold your hand, for Ireland still can strike a deadly blow.
Can strike a mortal blow,
Och! Heaven help! It's she that still could strike the deadly blow!

(STEVE *has put down his last sovereign. He throws the empty bag to* MICHELIN, *who puts the money into it quickly.*)

MICHELIN (*loudly*). Come on again, sir! The luck will come to you yet! For one time it will go for me there will maybe six times turn against me!

(*The bell rings and people are heard shouting and running towards it.*)

STEVE (*turning to* JULIA, *who has come back to them*). That is a good song. I am a long time without hearing it or the like of it.

JULIA. What a hurry they are in going, and in no hurry at

all to part with their ha'pence. (*She holds up her empty tambourine.*) That's all I'll do of singing. I'm near dead with the hunger.

MICHELIN. There was better luck came to myself, and I sitting at the board. (*He holds up the little bag and shakes it.*) That's what's better than ha'pence.

JULIA. What way did you get it? (*To* STEVE.) I'd be sorry if it was on yourself he lessened that much.

STEVE. Is it belittling myself and my means you would be, ma'am? I tell you my wealth is all one with the wealth of Steve Roland! (*Takes up his bundle.*) I'll go now put a few sovereigns on a horse having two red ears. There was a mermaid foretelling him to win, and she racking her hair in the waves. Well, it is great sport I had to-day! I'll be talking of it maybe in the far countries of the world! (*He goes off singing.*)

Oh, never fear for Ireland, for she has soldiers still.
For Rory's boys are in the wood and Remy's on the hill,
And never had poor Ireland more loyal hearts than these,
May God be kind and good to them, the faithful Rapparees!
The fearless Rapparees,
The men that rode at Sarsfield's side, the roving Rapparees!

MICHELIN. There now, we can pitch out that bit of a green loaf! It is crackers we will buy at the booths! (*He pours the money from the bag.*) Seven golden sovereigns won in the snap of a finger! That lad went random altogether!

JULIA. Gold! Is it gold it is! (*Takes it in her hand.*) I never felt that weight of it in my hand nor the half of it. You knocked a bad turn out of him taking it.

MICHELIN. He made a snug man of me anyway. I can leave this old rubbish of a board to go rot. (*He kicks it.*) He came like a seagull to our relief!

JULIA. You have a right to go after him and give it back to him, where he earned it with hands and sweat.

MICHELIN. Sure, he gave himself out to be as rich as Steve Roland.

JULIA. He is not. It is much if you left him enough to bury him.

MICHELIN. Ah, he to die, it is likely the police won't leave him overhead. Well, I to have that weight of gold in my hand I'll throw up a ladder of luck will reach to the treasuries of the moon!

JULIA. You will not keep it or spend it. You will go hurry after him with it. I now will tell you a thing will make you do that of your own will. That lad was Steve Roland that I gave my promise to, and that came back seeking for me to be his wife.

MICHELIN. I partly guessed that.

JULIA. You thought that?

MICHELIN. I did, and it was grafted in my mind.

JULIA. You took his money knowing that?

MICHELIN. Won it, my darling. Won it.

JULIA. No, but tricking you did it. You are a tricker and a rogue of the gallows. I tell you it is to cheat you did. You maybe lost God doing that.

MICHELIN. So I was thinking myself. Which of us lost the most? If he parted with his earthly store, it is likely I may have parted with Heaven.

JULIA. Why did you win it so?

MICHELIN. For the same reason he lost it. To fill your little mouth with bees' honey and with bread.

JULIA (*looks in her little glass*). The both of you did that for me? Well, men are a comical class!

CURTAIN

THE BLACK BOTTLE

BY

SEUMAS O'BRIEN

SEUMAS O'BRIEN

Seumas O'Brien was born at Glenbrook, County Cork, Ireland, in 1880. His literary career began when he was instructor of sculpture at the Dublin Metropolitan School of art, 1910-12. During that period he wrote verse and art criticism for the newspapers, short stories and plays. In 1913 he came to the United States, where he became a free lance artist, writer, and lecturer. His collection of fables, *The Whale and the Grasshopper,* saved, according to Mr. Mencken, the Irish Renaissance from its prevailing melancholy.

His short play *Duty* was produced by the Irish Players at the Abbey Theater in 1913.

Published plays: *Duty; Magnanimity; Jurisprudence; The Black Bottle; Blind.*

CHARACTERS

PEGGY DUNSCOME, *a sailor's wife*
HANNAH DALY, *a neighbor*
NED CONDON, *an undertaker*
BILL NOLAN, *a tombstone-maker*
MICKEY JOE DUNSCOME, *a sailor*
THE BAILIFF (Jerry Maher)

SCENE: *Interior of Peggy's house near a seaport town in the southwest of Ireland.*

TIME: *The present.*

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THE BLACK BOTTLE

Interior of a sailor's house on the outskirts of a seaport town in the southwest of Ireland. The house is furnished in the usual way. PEGGY DUNSCOME, *a woman of forty-five, is patching an old coat by the fireside.* HANNAH DALY, *an elderly neighbor, enters.*

HANNAH (*as she pushes open the door*). God bless all here.

PEGGY. And you too, Hannah.

HANNAH. Wisha what are you doing now?

PEGGY. Can't you see for yourself? What did God give you eyes for?

HANNAH. Oh, it's patching you are, is it?

PEGGY. Yes, Hannah.

HANNAH (*shaking her head*). A bad omen, Peggy. A very bad omen. Those who patch soon go to pieces.

PEGGY (*indifferently*). I'm in pieces already. Sure it's prayers and the grace of God that's keeping myself and the house together.

HANNAH. I never met the like of you for having a poor mouth. Have you no good news for me at all?

PEGGY. No, Hannah; I'm worse off than when you were here last. There isn't enough of fire in the grate to warm a cockroach, or enough of food in the cupboard to fill the craw of a sparrow. And I'm head and ears in debt besides.

HANNAH. That's an old story, Peggy, but what am I going to do for the money you borrowed from me?

PEGGY. I don't know, Hannah. Can't you borrow it from someone else until my man comes home from sea with a purse of golden sovereigns?

HANNAH. Who would I borrow from when the few people I know are always borrowing from myself?

PEGGY. Surely you must know someone with a few shillings to spare. It's by borrowing that we all exist, and there's only the loan of ourselves in the world.

HANNAH (*anxiously*). When is himself likely to come back?

PEGGY. The Lord only knows. He hasn't been seen or heard of for a year past, but I'm offering up a novena for his safe and speedy return.

HANNAH. Is it praying you are for a man that hasn't bent his knee to a priest for twenty years?

PEGGY. Well, if prayers don't do any good, they can't do any harm. We must do something to ease our troubled minds.

HANNAH. If God heard the prayers of the poor they'd be no poverty. I'm beginning to think that that man of yours is drowned. There should have been word from him before now.

PEGGY. He was always a poor warrant to write, and what's more, he's thoughtless.

HANNAH. Thoughtless! Maybe he has a wife in every port, like the tinkers.

PEGGY. I don't believe he has. Who'd be bothered with the likes of him, but some fool like myself?

HANNAH. God forgive him for his neglect. But he's no better or worse than all the others. I wish that man of mine would get drowned, go to work or do something. He keeps grumbling and grouching from morning till night, and stays at home on the slightest excuse. But his complaints never interfere with his appetite. He has eaten me out of house and home and now I don't know what to do. I thought I could get the making of a meal from you, but you are worse off than myself.

PEGGY. Not worse off, because I have some prospects, thank God.

HANNAH. What prospects have you at all?

PEGGY. Well, if my man don't come home, I can marry again.

HANNAH. Marry again?

PEGGY. Yes, Hannah.

HANNAH. Is it taking leave of your senses you are? Once is enough for any woman to marry.

PEGGY. Once is too often, but what can I do when I have only middling health, and a weak constitution? It's only fit to be looked after by some kind-hearted man or other that I am.

HANNAH. It isn't much that you want, Peggy. Anyway it's no easy matter for a woman that's past her girlhood to find a husband these days, unless she has money.

PEGGY. I know three men who are dead in love with me this minute, and they are as jealous of each other as the fiddlers of Bantry. But not knowing whether I am a widow or not, I can't give any of them my hand or my heart.

HANNAH. Glory be to God! Who are they at all?

PEGGY (*proudly*). Jerry Maher, the bailiff, Ned Condon, the undertaker, and Bill Nolan, the tombstone-maker.

HANNAH. A choice selection! But which now do you like the best?

PEGGY. I hate the bailiff, but I like the other two a little better.

HANNAH. Then why don't you get the loan of a few pounds from the bailiff and pay me what's coming to me?

PEGGY. Sure he hold a mortgage on the house, and because I refused to give him my hand until I'll hear of my poor man's death, he swore he'd put me out on the roadside next week, if what I owe isn't paid. And he swore to be avenged on Ned Condon and Bill Nolan, too, for he blames them of robbing him of my affection.

HANNAH. Glory be to God! What a queer world it is to be sure! Love is only divided from hatred by a thin partition. (*Knock at door.*)

PEGGY (*startled*). That's the bailiff's knock, Hannah. Tell him I'm not here. I don't want to see or hear him. (*Hides in room.*)

HANNAH. All right, Peggy. I'll answer him. (*Opens door. The* BAILIFF *stands on the threshold.*)

BAILIFF. Is herself within?

HANNAH. She is not, Jerry.

BAILIFF. And where is she?

HANNAH. I don't know, Jerry. Gone to town, maybe. I'm waiting here for her myself.

BAILIFF. Will she be long I wonder?

HANNAH. That's more than I can tell.

BAILIFF. Isn't it a strange thing that she is nearly always out when I call?

HANNAH. She must go out some time. The poor woman is heart-broken worrying over that man of hers, and he not to write a scroll of a pen since he set sail for foreign parts.

BAILIFF. Dead men don't write, Hannah. And it's only foolishness to scorn the good offer that has been made her. (*Going out.*) Well, I'll be off with myself, but I'll call again.

HANNAH (*closing door*). I'll tell her you were here when she comes. (BAILIFF *goes out.*)

PEGGY (*coming from room*). Is he gone?

HANNAH. He is, Peggy.

PEGGY. Thank God for that. He's the greatest old fool of a man that ever was. He tells the same stories over and over again, and once he begins talking he never knows when to stop.

HANNAH. I don't believe he's half as bad as you paint him. He's more stupid than anything else, and it's my belief if he 'as asked for help in the right way, he wouldn't refuse it.

PEGGY. The same man wouldn't help his own mother.

HANNAH. Can't you make up your mind who you're going to have in case the worst happens?

PEGGY. I'm afraid I can't, Hannah. (*A knock is heard at the door.*)

PEGGY (*startled*). Come in.

(NED CONDON, *the undertaker, followed by a group of villagers, enters. He has a large parcel under his arm, and a black tassle with a sheet of white paper sticking out of it in his pocket.*)

PEGGY. What's after happening at all, Ned?

NED. I hate to tell you, Peggy, for it's the harbinger of bad news that I am. More's the pity. (*Hands the bottle with the paper sticking out.*) This is a message from the sea, Peggy, the cruel and relentless sea that respects neither king, prince, nor beggar. It was picked up on the strand this morning by one of the fishermen and brought to Dorgan's public house from whence I have hurried with sad and doleful tidings.

PEGGY. Is it about my poor dacent man the bad news is?

NED. Read for yourself, Peggy.

PEGGY (*looks at the sheet of paper and bursts into tears*). I can't read it. I can't read it. Let you do the reading for me, Ned.

NED. You're putting a heavy penance on me now, Peggy, for when I read it a while since I broke down. However, I'll do my best, for there isn't a thing in this wide world that I wouldn't do for you. (*Takes out his glasses, wipes them ceremoniously before putting them on, and reads.*) "Longitude 125°02, Latitude 173°64. Wind west, north west; Hurricane blowing and sweeping all before it. Eliza Kate about to founder. Captain orders men to the boats, but there are no boats, rafts, or any portable commodity that would bear the weight of a man in the tempestuous seas. No hope of the crew being saved from the onslaught of the storm. (*A pause.*) Will and last testament of Michael Joseph Henry Dunscome." (PEGGY *weeps.*)

NED. Restrain yourself a moment. You haven't heard the worst yet. (*Proceeds.*) "I, Michael Joseph Henry Dunscome of the village of Ballydaniel in the townland of Glounthane, and the Barony of Kilburton, do hereby bequeath and relinquish my worldly possessions as follows: My house and all that goes with it to be sold by auction, and the money realized on same to be spent in masses for the repose of my immortal soul. My Sunday suit of clothes and my white necktie to be given to Edward Condon."

HANNAH. That's yourself, Ned.

NED. Yes, Hannah, God reward him for his kindness. (*Proceeds.*) And my everyday suit to go to William Nolan."

HANNAH. Lord rest his soul. I'm glad he remembered Bill. He's the heart's blood of a gentleman.

NED (*continuing*). "To my wife, Peggy Dunscome, in recognition of her industry and good sense and faithfulness, I give permission to marry again if she thinks fit. Any loose money that I may leave after me to be spent on my wake, and now before going to my doom I'll give my blessing and good-bye to all." (*The two women cry and the men try to soothe them.*)

NED. Peggy, Peggy, Peggy! You mustn't give way like that.

PEGGY. Oh my poor man! My poor dacent man! My poor Mickey Joe is gone from me forever. What will I do? What will I do? What will I do without him at all?

NED. Now, now. You mustn't fly in the face of God like that. Things are never as bad as they seem.

HANNAH. That's true for you, Ned. Maybe he'll turn up after all! If there's anyone to be saved from the wreck it's himself, for he always had the devil's luck, and was made to reap the harvest that others sow.

PEGGY (*weeping*). To think that he should be taken from me in his perfect health and strength!

HANNAH. Don't be distressing yourself. I don't believe he is dead at all. With God's help he'll come back to us again.

NED (*embarrassed*). Of course we'd all like to see him again, but in the face of the evidence to hand I don't think we will. The Eliza Kate was on her last legs by all accounts when she put to sea. It was the general opinion of her owners that she would never return. That was why they put the heavy insurance on her before she sailed.

PEGGY. God pity me this blessed day. What's to become of me at all?

NED. You need never want while I am here to protect and look after you, Peggy.

PEGGY. I would rather one look at poor Mickey Joe than all the world. He was as fine a man as ever stepped in shoe leather, Ned.

NED. He was all that, rest his soul. He was brave at all events. Only a brave man would go to sea in a leaky ship. Come now, stop your crying and let us carry out the wishes of the dead. It's the least that we might do for them that are gone before us. I brought some wax candles and a few bottles of port wine.

PEGGY. You are kindness itself, Ned.

NED. Not at all, Peggy.

HANNAH. We'd better get the table ready. (*While* NED *is talking to* PEGGY, HANNAH *takes four brass candlesticks from the mantelpiece and places them on the little table in the corner. Then she puts the wax candles in them and takes a photo of* MICHAEL JOSEPH *off the wall and places it in the center of the table.*)

NED. You'll find now that everything will be for the better.

PEGGY. I'll never be able to thank you.

NED. I'm not looking for thanks. I get all my pleasure from being kind to others. And that reminds me, I took a little liberty this morning when I heard of your trouble, which I hope you won't take offense at.

PEGGY. What did you do, Ned? Something kind, of course.

NED. I cleared the mortgage off the house. (*Takes out the receipt for the money paid.*) Here now, put that in your stocking. (*She takes it.*)

PEGGY. Why did you do that, Ned?

NED. You know yourself why I did it. You must not worry any more about that man of yours. It is the will of God that he should go. And none of us go before our time. Sure I told you months ago he would never return. Anyone who saw the Eliza Kate leaving the wharf could have guessed that. And if you were said by me you could have been married to myself all this time, and wearing silks and satins like the best ladies in the land. But it isn't too late

yet. You can go down to the dressmaker's and order anything at all you may want. I'll defray the expenses.

HANNAH (*admiring the table*). Well, Peggy, what do you think of it?

PEGGY. It's lovely, Hannah, but I'd rather one look at himself than it all.

NED. Don't you think the wake should be held in the other room?

PEGGY. I do, Ned. It's the best place for it.

NED. That's my belief too. Here now, give me a hand with the table.

(NED *and* HANNAH *take the table into the room and the others follow.* BILL NOLAN *comes on with a parcel under his arm.*)

PEGGY. Welcome, Bill. I suppose you heard the bad news?

BILL. Indeed I did, Peggy, and I'm not the same man since.

PEGGY. What will I do without him, Bill?

BILL. You must pray to the Lord to give you strength to bear your trials and tribulations, Peggy. It's a sad world for us all. We never know from the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night what's going to happen.

PEGGY. That's true for you, Bill.

BILL. My own poor father was carried off without a moment's notice.

PEGGY (*weeping*). But think of Mickey Joe and he to be washed from the deck of a ship into the angry sea, and devoured by a whale, maybe.

BILL. The poor man is better off, Peggy, and he got a good clean death anyway. Wisha, what's in this life for any of us?

PEGGY. Not much, indeed.

BILL. Worry and annoyance of some kind or other from the cradle to the grave. Anyway I'm sure he's happy. The gates of Heaven they say are always thrown open to them that are drowned. And if he wasn't much of a provider, he never did harm or hurt to anyone but himself, and his own.

PEGGY. Death is a terrible thing.

BILL. It comes to all our doors, but you won't be lonesome while I am here to keep you company. If Providence was to grant me a thousand wishes, Peggy, I'd only ask one and that is to look after and protect you till your dying day. The Lord never takes anything from us without giving something in return. And when He took Mickey Joe to Himself I'm certain He meant me to take his place. You are my one thought and comfort now, Peggy. When you are in my mind there's no happier man in the whole world than myself. (*Opens parcel.*) I brought a few pipes and snuff, and there will be a dozen of port wine here in a minute, that I ordered to be sent from Dorgan's. (*Taking a sheet of paper from his pocket.*) And this is the kind of tombstone I myself am going to erect to the one who braved the dangers of the deep and walked into the jaws of death. (*Holding up sketch for her inspection.*) What do you think of the design, Peggy?

PEGGY. It's a wonder entirely.

BILL. And listen to the wording, Peggy; it's all my own: "In sad and loving memory of Michael Henry Dunscome who was drowned at sea when the Eliza Kate foundered, in the Year of Our Lord, One thousand nine hundred and nineteen. May his soul rest in peace, Amen." We can plant a border of box palm around his grave and have it the nicest in the whole chapel yard.

PEGGY. You are going to an awful lot of expense, Bill, aren't you?

BILL. What good is money if we can't make someone happy with it? And see here what I have done also. I have paid off your debts, so that from now on you can hold your head in the air and look everyone in the face. (*Handing her a receipt.*) Here, take this.

PEGGY. You shouldn't have done so much for me. I'm not deserving of it.

BILL. That's only nonsense. We only get what we deserve. What will I do with the pipes and snuff, Peggy?

PEGGY. Bring them to the next room where they are holding the wake, if you please.

BILL. I will with pleasure. (*As he goes out,* NED CONDON *and* HANNAH *come back.*)

NED. Well, Peggy, everything is going on nicely. We must all die, and drowning is an easier death than hanging, at all events.

PEGGY. I know you are sorry for me, Ned, though himself and yourself were never too friendly.

NED. Oh, we were friendly enough. We only quarreled when we had reason. And now, Peggy, if you wouldn't mind me putting you to a little inconvenience, I'd like to have my legacy.

PEGGY. Your what?

(BILL NOLAN *comes back and stands beside* NED.)

NED. My legacy, Peggy; the suit of clothes I was left in the will.

HANNAH. What's coming over the people, I'd like to know! There seems to be as little reverence for the dead as for the living these days. One would think that the suit on your back wouldn't stand the next shower of rain or that you haven't the buyings of another.

NED. You can see for yourself that the bit of stuff was no good the first day.

HANNAH (*looking at* BILL NOLAN). What do you think of that, Bill?

BILL. These are bad times, Hannah. I, too, am sorry for Peggy's misfortune, and though I can get on without the old suit of clothes, I'd like to have it all the same. And between ourselves, I've earned it. I brought Mickey Joe seven long miles on my back the night he was found dead drunk on the roadside with a broken leg, and he cursing and swearing like a trooper every inch of the way. No doubt that's why he remembered me in his will.

HANNAH. Is this all the sympathy both of you have for a poor widow that has been thrown on the world by the cruel hand of fate?

NED. Of course we are sorry, but we might as well have the old clothes as for the moths to be eating them. They will only be reminding Peggy of her misfortune anyway.

PEGGY. I don't like to part with them, boys, because they are the only things that will remind me of him. He left me nothing else except his good wishes.

NED. Well, may we take them, Peggy? The sooner you learn to forget him the better.

PEGGY. Very well, then, take them.

(They take the old clothes and each puts on a coat which fits very badly.)

PEGGY. My poor man; my poor Mickey Joe! I wish I was in the watery grave with him.

NED. You mustn't say such things, Peggy. He's better off, and if ever his body is washed ashore, I'll bury it for nothing myself, in an oak coffin with brass plates on it.

(HANNAH *and* BILL *go back to the wake room.*)

PEGGY. It's too good you are entirely, Ned.

NED. A man can't be too good to the woman he loves, Peggy darling. *(She weeps.)* Now, now. No more of this. You'll be making an old woman of yourself with your wailing and lamenting.

PEGGY. It's a terrible thing to be deprived of the breadwinner, Ned.

NED. I know it is, but it would be worse if there wasn't another forthcoming. Don't worry. The dead are the best off. Each and every one of us get our due allotment of time, and when our day comes, off we go to make room for someone else. I have but one desire in life now and that is to make you happy. And though I am not as well-to-do as I was a few years ago, yet if the influenza that is raging in the west only strikes the town, and please God it will, I'll make a fortune in a month.

(BILL *comes from the room and is displeased at seeing his rival talking to* PEGGY.)

BILL *(coming back)*. You are wanted inside, Ned.

NED. Wisha what do they want me for at all? I've done my part.

BILL. To fix up the room and fill the pipes, I suppose.

NED. Oh, you can do that, Bill. You're more of an artist than I am.

BILL. It's part of your trade, so you had better go and do it.

NED. I'll go in a minute. I have a few words of sympathy to say to Peggy.

BILL. It's now you're wanted. The candles will set fire to the house if they're not arranged properly. (*Places his hand on* NED'S *shoulder.*) Now, like a good man be obliging. On an occasion like this, we should all do our best.

NED. I'll be damned if I'll take instructions from the likes of you.

BILL. And is it from you that I'm going to take them?

(*A voice from the next room,* "Poor Mickey Joe! Poor Mickey Joe!")

Go on now. You have been out here long enough. I'm surprised at your indifference.

NED. I'll go when I feel like it, but not till then.

PEGGY. For goodness' sake don't have any crossness. I'll go myself and fix the place.

BOTH. No, you will not, Peggy. I'll go.

(PEGGY *walks towards the door and* BILL *follows her.*)

BILL (*to* NED). You stay where you are. I'll help Peggy.

PEGGY. Don't bother. I'll do what has to be done myself.

(*While they are rambling* PEGGY *slips into the other room.*)

NED. Now see what's happened. You have turned her away.

BILL. It was you turned her away, and no wonder, too. A look from you would be enough to turn the cows from the meadow. I don't see for the life of me what you want coming here at all for.

NED. Why wouldn't I come here as well as you?

BILL. You know my heart was set on Peggy long before that bluttering fool of a husband of hers. You have no sense of chivalry, Ned Condon, no sense of chivalry! But what

could one expect from a poor, miserable sleveen of an undertaker!

NED. Isn't an undertaker as good as a tombstone-maker, and a dam sight better?

BILL. That question is too absurd to be answered. I for one don't think so at all events.

NED. Well, the lady of the house does, and not only does she think more about my calling, but she thinks more about myself also.

BILL. I wouldn't take your word for less than that.

NED. If you won't, then it's easy to find out the truth. (*Goes to the door of the wake-room.*) Mrs. Dunscome, ma'am?

PEGGY (*as she comes out*). What's the matter now?

BILL (*pointing to* NED). This gentleman here, God forgive me for believing him, says he holds a higher place in your estimation than I do, and I want you to openly contradict him.

PEGGY (*very embarrassed*). What's coming over the pair of you at all?

BILL (*pointing to* NED). He says I have no right to be here, and I told him I had as good right as he has. Isn't that so? (*She does not answer.*)

PEGGY. You are both good friends of mine, and I am fond of all my friends.

BILL. I'm afraid we'll have to finish this dispute ourselves. (*He takes a pack of cards from the mantelshelf.*)

NED. What are you going to do?

BILL. We are going to play one game of forty-five, and whoever loses must withdraw from the conflict. (*To* NED.) Are you satisfied?

NED. I'm not satisfied; why should I be?

BILL. And what are you going to do?

NED. Let the lady of the house decide what's to be done.

PEGGY. I don't think it's fair to ask me to have hand, act or part in this transaction. The Lord knows I have trouble enough as it is.

NED. Then shuffle the cards. (*The cards are shuffled, and*

they play three times. NED *wins. After throwing down the winning cards he gets up from the table and puts his arms around* PEGGY *and kisses her on the forehead.*) Peggy, my darling, I've waited long years for you and I've won you at last.

BILL. No, you have not. You've cheated! You've cheated!

NED. Cheated!

BILL. Yes. You reneged the ace of hearts from the knave of trumps. The cards prove it. But what can one expect from a man who charges more for burying the poor people than would keep them alive!

NED. You'd better be careful of what you're saying. I got a good bringing up and never cheated anyone in my life.

BILL. Well, you have cheated now. (*Moves towards* NED *with his fists closed.*)

PEGGY. Is it the way you want to have a real corpse on my hands, and a real wake in my house, I wonder? Oh, God pity me this blessed day!

BILL. I only want to see that justice is done, Peggy. That man is a cheat and I can prove it.

PEGGY. And if he cheated itself, Bill, sure all is fair in love and war.

BILL. Oh, is it now? One would think you were Helen of Troy or the Queen of Sheba herself. He must play that game again with me, or I'll know for what.

NED. I'll be damned if I'll touch a card again for anyone. I won fair by my skill and ingenuity.

BILL. Well, if you don't play you are going to be flung outside this door then. The likes of you aren't fit to be seen in respectable company. (BILL *grips* NED *by the collar of the coat; a struggle ensues. The people come from the next room. During the height of the confusion the street door opens and the* BAILIFF *enters.*)

BAILIFF. What's all the rowing about? A nice way indeed to behave in the house of a man that's been drowned.

NED. What business is it of yours I'd like to know? We

want none of your interference. Didn't I pay what was coming to you on the mortgage this morning?

BAILIFF. You did, but that's no reason why you should be disturbing a poor widow who needs sympathy and consolation for the distress that has come on her. Any man in your shoes would have paid what she owed. (*Turning to* BILL.) It was decent of you too, Bill, to pay my sister the fifty pounds that Peggy owed her. She told me about your kindness as I was coming down the road.

NED. That's enough now from you. We've heard enough of your old talk. Be off with yourself out of here. You are not fit to be under the same roof as Peggy.

BAILIFF (*takes a chair and sits down*). The last man who tried to put me out of a house was buried for nothing. (*Pointing to the window.*) Over the cliff beyond he was flung.

PEGGY. Are you going to start rowing now, Jerry?

BAILIFF. Indeed I am not, Peggy. I only want the answer you promised me when you would hear of the death of Mickey Joe. You won't find a better provider or a fonder husband in the whole countryside than I am myself.

(*They all begin to wrangle, and more people come from the next room. During the heat of the confusion,* MICKEY JOE, *with a sailor's bag on his back, enters.*)

MICKEY JOE (*going over to* PEGGY). Peggy, Peggy! My own Peggy. What's the meaning of all this?

PEGGY (*coming to*). Is it yourself or your ghost that has come back, Mickey Joe?

MICKEY JOE. It's myself, of course, Peggy.

HANNAH. Didn't I tell you he'd come back. There was something told me we'd see you again, Mickey Joe.

MICKEY JOE. What made you think I wouldn't come, Peggy?

PEGGY (*holding out the scroll to him*). See for yourself. (*He takes it, reads it quickly.*)

MICKEY JOE. Sure that's not my writing at all. I never put a pen to paper since I was here last.

PEGGY. And who wrote it then?

MICKEY JOE. Jerry Maher, the bailiff, of course. There's no mistaking the bla'guard's writing. I know it well. (*Looking around.*) Why is the house full of strangers?

HANNAH. We are holding your wake, Mickey Joe.

MICKEY JOE. My wake?

PEGGY. Yes.

MICKEY JOE (*with surprise*). Oh! I see! (*Looking at* NED *and* BILL, *who are wearing his old clothes.*) It's more like a christening or a fancy dress ball. (*To* PEGGY.) Nice respect indeed you've shown to me to give away my belongings before you were sure whether I was dead or not. The good nature, I'm thinking, is leaving the people altogether. (*To* NED *and* BILL.) Well, why don't you divest yourselves of my garments now that I have come back?

NED. I will as soon as I'll get what's coming to me.

BILL. And so will I.

MICKEY JOE. What do you mean by speaking to a man in his own house like that for?

NED. In your house?

MICKEY JOE. Yes, my house.

NED. Wasn't it myself cleared the mortgage.

BILL. And it was I paid Peggy's debts.

MICKEY JOE. Is that a fabrication, Peggy?

PEGGY. No, Mickey Joe, it's the truth. (*Handing him the receipts.*) See for yourself.

MICKEY JOE (*with a smile as he puts the receipts in his pocket*). I don't think I will interfere with the will after all. Is there anything in the house? I'm as dry as a limekiln.

HANNAH (*handing him a glass of wine*). Here you are, Mickey Joe. Ned Condon sent a case of wine.

MICKEY JOE (*taking glass*). God bless you, Hannah. Well it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. (*Holding up glass before swallowing the contents.*) Here's long life to us all!

CURTAIN

THE KNIFE

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

Henry Arthur Jones was born at Grandborough, Bucks, England, in 1851. His first play, an unimportant one-acter, was performed in 1878. Four years later he produced *The Silver King*, one of the most popular melodramas of modern times. During the late 80's and early 90's Jones wrote several serious plays, at the same time appealing vigorously to the public on behalf of the drama he went so far to develop. Until a few years ago he continued to put forth social comedies and plays of a more serious character, the best of which were recognized as masterpieces of the modern English stage.

Like Pinero, Jones has written a few one-act plays for the music hall. Of these the most amusing is *Dolly's Little Bills*, a slightly adapted version of the famous "bill scene" in the longer comedy, *Dolly Reforming Herself*. *The Knife*, the most dramatic, is here published for the first time.

Published plays: *Harmony; Elopement; Hearts of Oak; A Clerical Error; An Old Master; A Bed of Roses; The Deacon; Sweet Will; Joseph Entangled; The Silver King; The Dancing Girl; The Hypocrites; Mrs. Dane's Defence; The Case of Rebellious Susan; The Liars; The Masqueraders; The Tempter; Dolly Reforming Herself; The Manœuvres of Jane; Judah; The Physician; Whitewashing Julia; The Rogue's Comedy; The Triumph of the Philistines; Mary Goes First; The Crusaders; Michael and His Lost Angel; Carnac Sahib; The Divine Gift; The Lie; The Goal; Her Tongue; Grace Mary; Dolly's Little Bills; The Knife.*

CHARACTERS

Sir Mark Ridgeway
Archie Kingsford
Bartlett, *a manservant*
The Nurse
Lady Ridgeway

Scene: *The ante-room outside the operating-room in a West End Nursing Home, London.*

Time: *During the Great War.*

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THE KNIFE

The ante-room outside the operating room in a West End Nursing Home. At back Left folding-doors open upon a passage. At back Right, door leading to operating-room. A fireplace with large bright fire burning, Left. The room is very bare of furniture and drapery; everything very clean and spruce; nothing that could harbor dust.

Enter, at back doors, which are left open, ARCHIE KINGSFORD; *about thirty, in a morning suit. He is pale and shows signs of agitation.*

NURSE HORNEY, *a pleasant-looking woman about thirty, is discovered at washing-stand, Right, preparing antiseptic mixture, etc.*

NURSE (*alarmed*). Mr. Kingsford! We've been looking everywhere for you. How could you go out, after Sir Mark's orders?

KINGSFORD (*placing overcoat on upper end of couch*). I had to! It was very important.

NURSE. But it might have been dangerous. It might have killed you!

KINGSFORD. I haven't come to any harm. Is Sir Mark here?

NURSE. Yes. (*Taking out her watch.*) It's just on the time for the operation. (*Crosses to writing-table, prepares bandage and towel, folds towels.*) The attendant's waiting for you in your room. You'd better go. (*Going off at back.*)

KINGSFORD. Nurse, may I trust you?

NURSE. Yes.

KINGSFORD. I may not get over this operation——

NURSE. Oh, yes! Remember, you're in Sir Mark's hands, and even if you weren't his own personal friend, you might be quite certain you'd be safe. You may almost say it's his own operation. He rarely gets a fatal case.

KINGSFORD. But he does get one occasionally. Nurse! I've a strong presentiment. I know I shall never go down those stairs alive——

NURSE (*still folding towels*). Oh, most patients have those sorts of presentiments—and they're nearly always false——

KINGSFORD (*shakes his head*). When Sir Mark told me last night that I must have an operation as soon as possible, I felt—(*shudders*)—I felt that Death was shutting his tweezers on me.

NURSE. Oh, come, come! You mustn't talk like that. Sir Mark will be waiting——

KINGSFORD (*shuts door and returns. Suddenly, with great earnestness*). Nurse, you're sure I may trust you?

NURSE (*she looks into his face. A slight pause*). Yes—in anything that's honorable.

KINGSFORD. Yes—yes. Will you do a very simple thing for me?

NURSE. Tell me.

KINGSFORD. No; promise me you'll do it. I ask you as a dying man.

NURSE. If it's anything I can do, I will.

KINGSFORD (*takes an unaddressed envelope out of his pocket*). If I go down under this—as I know I shall——

(NURSE *makes a gesture of protest. He shakes his head bitterly.*)

Yes! In this envelope is a letter addressed and stamped. If it's all over with me, will you open it, and put the letter inside the first pillar-box——

(SIR MARK RIDGEWAY *suddenly appears at back door Left. A well-built, strong, grave, grim, kindly London surgeon, about fifty. He enters unperceived, behind* KINGSFORD; *stands at door.*)

SIR MARK. Ah, Archie——

(KINGSFORD, *startled by his voice, instinctively slips the letter back into his pocket, unperceived by* SIR MARK.)

Where have you been? I gave you the strictest orders to stay in bed.

KINGSFORD. Don't blame me! I had to go—it was a matter of life and death.

SIR MARK (*shakes his head: looks at him*). It might have been a matter of life and death for *you*. (*To* NURSE.) Is everything ready? (*Goes to front of fire.*)

NURSE. Yes, sir.

(*She goes out, after placing towel on towel-horse by washing-place.*)

KINGSFORD. I'm in an awful funk!

SIR MARK. You didn't get any sleep?

KINGSFORD. Not a wink! I had a horrible night. I'm not going to get over this——

SIR MARK. Nonsense! Nonsense! I invite you to dine with us four weeks to-night—I forgot! I shall be in France by then.

KINGSFORD. You've decided to go out then?

SIR MARK. I must! I don't want to leave my practice, and my wife; but now the old country's in such a terrible hole, if I can be of use to our poor chaps out there I've simply got to go!

KINGSFORD. I see on the placards they've pushed us back again. And awful losses!

SIR MARK. Awful!

KINGSFORD. When do you go? (*Sits on couch.*)

SIR MARK. Saturday. So, as I shall be away, I invite you to dine with Linda four weeks to-night.

KINGSFORD. If I'm alive ——

SIR MARK. Hush! Your chances of being alive six months from now are a good deal better than mine. If anything should happen to me out there, you'll be a friend to Linda?

KINGSFORD (*with a curious kind of hesitation*). Yes . . . of course.

SIR MARK. If she'd only had a child, Archie, I shouldn't feel I was leaving her, then. If only she'd had a child! Poor girl! Poor girl!

KINGSFORD. She has her father and brother, if—if——

SIR MARK (*a step nearer*). But they're both going out, and if anything happened to me (*with great feeling*), Linda might be left. I'm going to do you a good turn this morning. Archie, remember that, by-and-by, if Linda ever needs a friend, will you? (*Holding out his hand.* KINGSFORD *shows a momentary reluctance to take it.* SIR MARK *shakes his hand heartily.*)

KINGSFORD. If you wish it. . . .

SIR MARK. I do. Leaving her is a terrible wrench to me.

KINGSFORD (*cunningly*). Lady Ridgeway feels it too?

SIR MARK. Yes . . . at least . . . Of course, I'm older than she. I've often thought it was wrong of me to marry her, especially as I was already married to my work; but—(*with a change of manner*) now we'll get this little job of yours over, shall we? (*Crosses over to wash-stand, going behind couch, pours liquid soap into basin.*)

KINGSFORD. Have you heard from Lady Ridgeway?

SIR MARK. Yes; I got a telegram from her at breakfast.

(KINGSFORD *crosses; shows a keen, cunning interest, unobserved by* SIR MARK.)

She's coming up from Hampshire this morning.

KINGSFORD (*rises*). This morning?

SIR MARK. Yes; she had arranged to see her father and brother off from Southampton to-morrow, but I suppose she has changed her plans. She'll be very sorry to hear of your operation, especially as there was no hint of it when you dined with us last week. (*Moving towards* KINGSFORD.)

KINGSFORD. No—no hint of it then!

SIR MARK. I shall be able to tell her at lunch that you bore it splendidly and that you're going on well.

KINGSFORD. If I *am* going on well.

SIR MARK. You will be . . . (*Affectionately, putting his hand on* KINGSFORD'S *shoulder.*)

KINGSFORD. You're a brick, Ridgeway. You must let me pay you your ordinary fee.

SIR MARK. I won't hear of such a thing!

KINGSFORD. I insist! I shan't feel comfortable if I don't. Why should I put you to all this bother and loss of time? (*Moves to fireplace.*)

SIR MARK. Because I'm the best man for the job—I was going to say, the only man for the job. Don't be afraid, old fellow. We'll pull you through all right. (*Hugging him affectionately.*)

(*Enter* BARTLETT, *a manservant.*)

BARTLETT. If you please, Sir Mark, Lady Ridgeway is below, and says could you see her for a moment?

SIR MARK. Certainly. I'll come to her, Bartlett. (BARTLETT *goes out.*) Will you go to your room and get ready, Archie? I won't be a moment.

(*He is going off at back, when* LADY RIDGEWAY *enters. A beautiful woman, about thirty, in a handsome traveling dress.*) Linda! (*Brings her down to behind couch.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. May I come in? (*To* SIR MARK.) I wanted to see you, Mark. They said at the door you were just going to operate. I asked who it was. When I heard it was Mr. Kingsford, I thought you wouldn't mind my running up. (*To* KINGSFORD) I'm so sorry—so sorry! It's not serious, I hope? (*Shaking hands across couch.*)

SIR MARK. No—not in the least!

KINGSFORD. Ridgeway says I shall soon come round, and he has asked me to dine with you four weeks to-night.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Then it isn't serious. I'm so glad.

SIR MARK. You wanted to see me. Is it anything important?

LADY RIDGEWAY. It can wait till lunch. I'd rather not delay the operation. (*To* KINGSFORD) All my sympathy and best wishes.

KINGSFORD. Thank you.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Perhaps I may call and see you when you are well enough for visitors?

KINGSFORD. Yes, do, please.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*shaking hands*). Good-bye.

KINGSFORD. Good-bye.

SIR MARK (*who has been looking at watch*). You must have got up at an unearthly hour.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes, I wanted to have a long day in town and get some presents for Father and Jack for France. They leave to-morrow. (*Goes towards door.*)

SIR MARK. What train did you catch?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Six forty-five.

SIR MARK. Six forty-five! How on earth did you manage to do it? Six forty-five!

(*Enter* NURSE.)

NURSE. Sir, the Anesthetist.

(LADY RIDGEWAY *and* KINGSFORD *exchange a quick, furtive look.*)

SIR MARK. Dr. Sanders? I'll come at once. (*Crosses Right.*)

KINGSFORD. It's chloroform you're giving me, I suppose?

SIR MARK. Chloroform and ether. And a very nice little drink it is. But don't you worry! You'll know nothing about it. In a month you'll be a new man; a better man than you've ever been.

(*He goes out into operating-room.* LADY RIDGEWAY *and* KINGSFORD *watch him off, and then go quickly and silently to each other's arms. They stand locked in a long, silent, passionate embrace. The following scene is played in low, quick tones, with great apprehension on the part of both.* LADY RIDGEWAY *stands Right of couch,* KINGSFORD *kneeling over it.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*after a long embrace*). Oh, my dear one! My dear one! This is terrible. Why didn't you let me know before?

KINGSFORD. I didn't know myself until yesterday afternoon. I'd been in great pain for I took no notice. I met him at the Club, and told him about it. He said it was a serious surgical case, and that I must have an operation at once—this

morning. I was stunned. I walked about for an hour—then suddenly I heard some words—they came like a thunderbolt into my brain!

LADY RIDGEWAY. What words?

KINGSFORD. "You won't get over this! You've got to die! You won't get over this! You've got to die!" I've been hearing them ever since.

(*Noise off stage.* STUDENTS *talking, etc.* LADY RIDGEWAY *turns, frightened.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*snatches his hand and kisses it*). My poor dear! My only one!

KINGSFORD. I dashed into the first post-office, and sent you that long telegram—you got it all right? (*She nods.*) I oughtn't to have sent it.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes, yes! Why not?

KINGSFORD. It must have alarmed you. And then, there's the risk for you——

LADY RIDGEWAY. What risk?

KINGSFORD. If it were traced—if he should get to know——

LADY RIDGEWAY. How could he? You worded it so carefully. I would never have forgiven you if you hadn't sent for me. You came to meet me?

KINGSFORD. Yes; sneaked out, and saw the train in—you weren't there——

LADY RIDGEWAY. No. I got up early—I had no sleep. I was dressed at four. The servants were late; they couldn't get a cab, so I missed the train.

KINGSFORD. How did you get here?

LADY RIDGEWAY. I took a special up. I was only five minutes behind at Waterloo. I thought perhaps you would wait——

KINGSFORD. If I had known!

LADY RIDGEWAY. Thank God, I have seen you! Oh! you won't die, Archie! You shan't! You shan't! I can't let you! You're in good hands——

(*More noises off stage.* LADY RIDGEWAY *again turns.*)

KINGSFORD. Yes, that's just it. If it were anyone but him!

(*They move just below the couch.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. But he's the best man in London.

KINGSFORD. I can't bear him to touch me.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Why?

KINGSFORD. I've been such a blackguard to him.

LADY RIDGEWAY. No! No! Don't speak of it! We loved each other. We couldn't help it.

KINGSFORD. No, I suppose not. But that doesn't make me the less a blackguard.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Hush! hush! You wouldn't change what we are to each other?

KINGSFORD. Not for worlds. But that doesn't make me less a blackguard.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You'll break my heart!

KINGSFORD (*takes her in his arms again*). My dearest! My dearest!

LADY RIDGEWAY. Oh, I'm so glad we've had these few moments. I've so many thousand things to tell you—but you know them all.

KINGSFORD. Yes—I know them all!

LADY RIDGEWAY. Oh! I can't let you die! Why should you?

KINGSFORD. Because—if I could get another surgeon——

LADY RIDGEWAY. No, no! It's too late. Promise me you won't think of that?

KINGSFORD. As you wish. I daresay it's only my fears. . . .

LADY RIDGEWAY. That's all. And we shall laugh at this, and dine together four weeks to-night.

KINGSFORD. Shall we? Shall we?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes, yes! I feel we shall.

KINGSFORD. If it were not he!—he's such a good chap—such a good friend——

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes—he's a good chap. Oh, I know it! It's a horrible tangle, isn't it? You got my telegram?

KINGSFORD. What telegram?

LADY RIDGEWAY. I wired last night confirming the appointment at Waterloo to meet you.—You never got it?

KINGSFORD. No.

LADY RIDGEWAY. I paid a man handsomely to take it into Southampton last night. He must have shirked it.

KINGSFORD (*goes closer to her: they are now Center*). Yes—don't worry about it. Oh, my dearest! If this should be the end——

LADY RIDGEWAY. It isn't! It isn't!

KINGSFORD. He'd better not find me here. (*He takes her in his arms for a second time, then moves up toward the doors. As he is going, she speaks.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. Good-bye for a little while.

KINGSFORD (*leaves her and goes up to the door*). Oh, I forgot! (*He stops by door.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. What? (*Goes up a step.*)

KINGSFORD. When I found you hadn't come this morning, I wrote you this letter. Read it when I—(*Gives her the letter. He offers her the letter when the door opens and* SIR MARK *enters. His entrance startles them, and the letter drops between them.* LADY RIDGEWAY *puts her foot on it.* SIR MARK *has noticed it, but says nothing. He crosses over towards door, going behind* LADY RIDGEWAY, *speaking as he goes.*)

SIR MARK (*to* KINGSFORD). Not getting ready, Archie?

KINGSFORD. I'm rather funking it, so I waited to chat with Lady Ridgeway.

(*When* SIR MARK *has crossed to doors* LADY RIDGEWAY *picks up letter and puts it into her muff, and crosses Right.*)

SIR MARK. We're all waiting for you. You'd better get ready—don't lose any more time. (*Opens doors.*)

KINGSFORD. Good-bye once more, Lady Ridgeway.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Good-bye.

(KINGSFORD *goes out at back.* SIR MARK *sees him off, and closes doors after him.*)

Is it really a serious case? You do think he'll get over it?

SIR MARK (*crosses to her before speaking, in a quiet, firm voice*). Give me that letter.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Letter?

SIR MARK. The letter he has just given you.

LADY RIDGEWAY. He hasn't given me any letter. It was merely a memorandum of the things I have to get to-day, and I was glancing through it when you came in.

SIR MARK (*same quiet, firm tone*). Give me that letter.

LADY RIDGEWAY. I have told you what it contains.

SIR MARK. If it contains what you say, you can have no reason for hiding it from me.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You're not going to be so absurd as to open my letters——

SIR MARK. Not after this, if you have told me the truth. But I mean to see this one.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*attempting to get to the door at the back*). You have no right. (*He stops her.*) Please let me pass!

SIR MARK. Not till I've seen that letter.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Don't you believe me?

SIR MARK. No. Just now, as I was coming out of the operating room, the Nurse called me aside to ask my advice.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Advice?

SIR MARK. She is a very straight woman. Kingsford fears he won't get over this, and he asked her to post some important letter. He couldn't satisfy her that it was an honorable business, and she consulted me as to what she ought to do.

LADY RIDGEWAY. What did you say?

SIR MARK. I couldn't quite satisfy her: so I was going to offer Kingsford to post his letter for him.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Well?

SIR MARK. If that letter isn't from him, his own is still in his possession. I don't want to agitate him at a time like this, but if you don't do what I ask, I shall send for him and find out whether he still has his letter. If he has, all right. If he hasn't, I mean to see that before you leave this room. (*Going to bell.*) Shall I send for him? It might be dangerous—fatal. Shall I ring? (*Crosses over to fireplace bell; is about to touch it.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*very slight pause*). No. . . .

SIR MARK. Then give me that letter.

(*He is crossing back to her when the door opens, and the* NURSE *comes in as he is saying his next line.* LADY RIDGEWAY *takes letter out of pocket, suddenly turns round, tears it up, puts pieces in her muff.*)

Ah! you have shown me I am right.

(NURSE *opens door, and looks in.* SIR MARK *stops and appears quite calm.*)

NURSE. Sir, Dr. Sanders wants to know how long you'll be, because he has to give chloroform to a case in Bloomsbury at twelve, and if he's likely to be detained here he must let them know in time.

(*During* NURSE'S *presence,* LADY RIDGEWAY *has gone to fireplace, taken the pieces of letter out of her muff, and thrown them on the fire,* SIR MARK *watching her, his back to the* NURSE.)

SIR MARK. Tell him we shan't be many minutes now. I won't get him too late for his other appointment.

NURSE. Thank you, sir. (*She goes out.*)

SIR MARK. How far has this gone?

LADY RIDGEWAY. How far has what gone? (*Seated on club fender, at fire, facing audience.*)

SIR MARK. This affair between you and Kingsford.

LADY RIDGEWAY. There is no affair between me and Mr. Kingsford—except friendship.

SIR MARK (*scornfully*). Friendship! (*Crosses right of the couch.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. Friendship. Friendship. (*Looking straight at him.*)

SIR MARK (*looking straight at her. After a pause*). No more?

LADY RIDGEWAY. No more.

SIR MARK. Linda, can I believe you? No! You've changed to me these last few months.

LADY RIDGEWAY. How changed?

SIR MARK. You've been cold to me—avoided me——

LADY RIDGEWAY. You fancy that.

SIR MARK. Why should you suddenly change your plans, and

come up here in the middle of the night? Why should he rush out this morning on some unknown errand, when I gave him the strictest orders not to leave his room? Why should you call to see me here on some pretended business?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Pretended business!

SIR MARK. Then tell me what it was.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Jack wants you to lend him some money, for me to get some things for him to take to France. Will you?

SIR MARK. Your brother has a very good allowance. He can't be hard up. Why didn't he come up with you? Linda, for God's sake, tell me the truth!—I can't beat it into me. It's not true! It can't be true! Archie Kingsford, of all men! It must be a lie! He couldn't—he couldn't! And you—(*seizing her hands and looking steadfastly at her*) you're not a bad woman—(*passing round lower end of couch to front of fire, where she is*).

LADY RIDGEWAY. Then why do you call me one?

SIR MARK. Are you? Are you a . . . ? Tell me! I can't go out to France in this awful suspense! Tell me the truth. How far has this gone?

LADY RIDGEWAY. I have told you, and you don't believe me. And now I suppose you will always suspect me?

SIR MARK. Yes—no—I don't know. Swear there's no more than friendship between you and Archie Kingsford.

LADY RIDGEWAY. What would be the use of my swearing, when you don't take my word?

SIR MARK. Swear it!

LADY RIDGEWAY. Of course I'll swear it, if it will set your mind at rest and let you get on with the operation.

(SIR MARK *gets to Right of couch.*)

Mark, this is unworthy of you. And when your friend's life is at stake! Take my word for the moment, and do the operation; then come home and question me as much as you please. I'll tell you all that there is to tell, though that's not much, and you'll be sorry you allowed yourself to sus-

pect me. Hadn't you better do the operation?—you ought not to risk that? (*Watching him very keenly.*)

SIR MARK (*crosses to chair Right of couch and sits*). It has to be done—and I'd better not leave it to be bungled by somebody else. Very well! But first I must know the main thing—(*looking at her*).

LADY RIDGEWAY. The main thing?

SIR MARK. You aren't actually—false?

LADY RIDGEWAY. No!

SIR MARK (*immensely relieved*). Thank God! Thank God! Now I can do it. (*As he turns from her, she shows a great secret relief, and comes to Right of couch.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. That's right. And I'll get on with my shopping. I shall see you at lunch, and you can tell me how it has gone. I hope it will be all right——

SIR MARK. You're not deceiving me?

LADY RIDGEWAY. There! I said you would always suspect me.

SIR MARK. No, I'll put it aside. But be sure you're ready to answer all my questions, for I don't mean to let this rest till I know——

LADY RIDGEWAY. You shall!

SIR MARK. Now, go. And let me steady myself. (*Crosses to window.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*going off*). Till lunch, then. (*As she is going off,* BARTLETT *enters, with telegram on salver. She sees it, and stays at doors.* SIR MARK *notices her look at the telegram, and crosses to servant.*)

BARTLETT. Telegram for Mr. Kingsford, sir—it came last night. I was busy for the moment, and put it on the hall table. Somehow it must have slipped under the Bradshaw, for I've only just found it. Had I better take it to Mr. Kingsford?

SIR MARK (*has noticed* LADY RIDGEWAY'S *behavior*). No. Give it to me. (*Taking telegram, as* BARTLETT *goes out. Then looking at telegram*) Why are you waiting? (*Goes to her almost to doors.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. Nothing. Will you lend Jack the money?

SIR MARK. Yes—if he'll wire me for it. (*Balancing the telegram and watching her.*) Why are you waiting?

LADY RIDGEWAY. What time shall you be in to lunch?

SIR MARK. Very early. Immediately after the operation. Don't wait. (*Looking at the telegram, turning it over, balancing it; suddenly advancing to her.*) Did you send Kingsford a telegram last night?

LADY RIDGEWAY. No.

SIR MARK (*about to open it*). Then I can open this.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*she starts a little towards him*). Why?

SIR MARK. He's not likely to have an affair with another woman—and he mustn't be disturbed with any business just now. (*Again makes a feint to open it.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*with a gesture towards it*). No!

SIR MARK. Then it is from you! (*Tears it open, reads it eagerly. Looks at her with great scorn and reproach, and utters three indignant exclamations*). Archie Kingsford is your lover!

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes.

SIR MARK. Your accepted lover?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes.

SIR MARK. In my place?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes.

SIR MARK. You've broken our marriage?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes. (*Speaking quite calmly, comes down and puts muff on sofa*). And I'm glad you know it. The deceit and suspense have been horrible! Now it's over! I shan't need to lie and trick you any longer. Yes, I'm glad you know it.

SIR MARK (*bitterly*). It is as well, perhaps.

LADY RIDGEWAY. I would have told you before, but I was a coward about my reputation, as all women are—and I wanted to spare you pain.

SIR MARK (*drop[illegible] down stage to just above her*). You wanted to spare me pain?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Honestly I did. And you have always been a good, kind husband——

SIR MARK. Have I? Then why have you betrayed me? Why have you thrown me over, and broken up our home?

LADY RIDGEWAY. I didn't mean to do it. I didn't mean to wrong you.—If anyone had told me, a year ago, I could do this, I wouldn't have believed it possible!

SIR MARK. Nor I—if anyone had told me this morning. It isn't possible! It isn't you!— Tell me, why did you do it? Have I ill-treated you? Neglected you?

LADY RIDGEWAY. No, not exactly neglected——

SIR MARK. What, then? Tell me what I should have done to keep you.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You were a good deal away from home—he and I were thrown together——

SIR MARK. And while I was away from home, busy for you, this friend of mine was busy sneaking my wife from me—and you were busy—— (*Comes down Right of her.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. You needn't blame us—we blame ourselves enough.

SIR MARK. "We!"

LADY RIDGEWAY. We didn't do it lightly—we have suffered terrible self-reproach. Believe me, we have!

SIR MARK. "We!" "We!" "We!" You have talked it over with him! You and he have pitied me together!

LADY RIDGEWAY. There's no more to be said. We don't excuse ourselves. We don't ask you to excuse us. We don't ask forgiveness——

SIR MARK. You don't ask forgiveness?

LADY RIDGEWAY. What forgiveness can there be? If you forgave me, that would not stop my loving him.

SIR MARK. You love him?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes. This last night has shown me how much. For all that, I'm sorry I've wronged you—oh, deeply sorry! (*He looks at her.*) You may believe me. I don't think this would have happened if we'd had a child. (*Drops down lower.*)

SIR MARK (*shows that he is mortally stung*). Don't say anything about that! You love him!

LADY RIDGEWAY. Haven't I told you so? Why do you make me repeat it?

SIR MARK. But you did love me? You did love me?

LADY RIDGEWAY. Yes, I suppose—in a way.

SIR MARK. You did love me! I've felt the change these last four months. You say yourself that twelve months ago this wouldn't have been possible. If he hadn't come between us——

(*The door at back is opened by a* NURSE. *She crosses to doors at the right, opens them and waits for* KINGSFORD, *who follows her. In the room to the right are discovered two* SURGEONS *and two extra* NURSES.)

LADY RIDGEWAY. Hush! (*Goes to fire: sits on club fender:* KINGSFORD *enters. Left, wearing long dressing-gown only, ready for operation. Doors left open.*)

KINGSFORD. Still there, Lady Ridgeway? (SIR MARK *throws her a warning look.*) Good-bye. Ready, Ridgeway?

SIR MARK. Yes—in a moment. (KINGSFORD *goes out Right. The door is closed.*) If he hadn't come between us—if he hadn't come between us! Damn him! damn him! damn him! (*Goes furiously towards doors Right.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*coming quickly to couch*). What's to be done? The operation is urgent, isn't it?

SIR MARK. Yes.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Who's the next best man to do it?

SIR MARK. I am.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*comes to him*). You!

SIR MARK. Yes.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You'll do it *now?*

SIR MARK. Yes.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You can trust yourself?

SIR MARK. Yes.

LADY RIDGEWAY. Are you sure of yourself? Mark, is it wise? Do you think he'll die?

SIR MARK. Better men have died.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You think he won't get over it?

SIR MARK (*holding out his hand before him to see that it is quite steady*). Oh, yes, he'll get over it—unless——

LADY RIDGEWAY. Unless what?

SIR MARK. Unless my hand should happen to shake.

LADY RIDGEWAY. What do you mean? (*Looks at him searchingly—suddenly.*) You are going to kill him?

SIR MARK. Nonsense! Don't flurry me. Go home.

LADY RIDGEWAY. You're going to kill him! This is what he meant! He said he knew he wouldn't get over it, and he won't!

SIR MARK. Go home! Wait for me there.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*catching hold of him, fiercely*). You shan't touch him! You shan't touch him! (*Clinging to him. He backs her up to doors, Left, which have been left open by* KINGSFORD.)

SIR MARK. Will you be quiet! Go home.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*clinging to him*). If you kill him, I'll tell all the truth! I'll expose you!

SIR MARK. You mean you'll expose yourself. (*Trying to shake her off.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY. I don't care! I shall expose you!

SIR MARK (*trying to put her hands away*). Will you leave go of me, and let me steady myself for my work?

LADY RIDGEWAY. I'll tell everyone the truth!

SIR MARK (*laughing at her*). Tell everyone—but go! (*He pushes her gently outside the doors at back, and closes them. As he does so,* NURSE *enters from Right.*)

NURSE. Everything's ready, sir. (*Goes out again.*)

SIR MARK. All right—I'm coming. (*He comes into the middle of the room, steadies himself, holds out his hand to see if it shakes, goes to door Right, braces himself with an effort, and goes out Right. Iron door slams.*

There is a long pause. The door Left back opens. LADY RIDGEWAY *looks in, listens, creeps up to door Right, listens, walks up and down, sits, wrings her hands, walks up and down in an agony of suspense: kneels as in prayer.*

The curtain falls for thirty seconds, and reveals her, listening at the door, then walking up and down in agony. One quarter of the hour chimes.

A noise of furniture pushed about in operating room startles LADY RIDGEWAY *and she moves toward the table.*

Enter SIR MARK. *Right, his white tunic splashed with blood. He gives tunic to* NURSE, *and puts on coat; goes to wash hands.*)

LADY RIDGEWAY (*after a pause*). Well? Is he dead? Is he dead?

SIR MARK (*washing his hands*). No; it's one of my most successful cases. As I told him, in a month or so he'll be a better man than he's ever been.

LADY RIDGEWAY. God bless you, Mark! (*He crosses towards doors and stops with back to audience when she speaks.*) I'm sorry I misjudged you. What are you going to do with me? (*She drops down into chair.*)

SIR MARK. Set you free of me.

LADY RIDGEWAY. And you?

SIR MARK. I'm off to France to do what I can for our poor fellows. I'm wanted there. (*Bitterly.*) I'm not wanted here. Good-bye.

LADY RIDGEWAY (*cries out*). Mark!—you forgive me? Say you forgive me!

SIR MARK (*after a little pause, in a tone at once pitiful and contemptuous*). Yes, I forgive you. Good-bye. (*He then goes out at the back.*)

CURTAIN

CLAUDE

BY

HERMON OULD

HERMON OULD

Hermon Ould was born at London in 1886. His first connection with the theater was when, as a boy of ten, he appeared in *Siegfried* at The Covent Garden Opera House. For some years after that he earned his living as a singer. When his voice broke he entered business, leaving it when his first play, *Between Sunset and Dawn*, was produced in 1913. He was joint editor of *Theatre-Craft* and was later associated with the *English Review*. At present he contributes extensively to English and Continental periodicals.

Published plays: *Between Sunset and Dawn; What Fools These Mortals Be; Christmas Eve; The Black Virgin; The Dance of Life; Peter the Pied Piper; Rip Van Winkle; The Princess in the Sleeping Wood; The Pathfinder; Joan the Maid; The Discovery; Thy Father and Thy Mother; Claude.*

CHARACTERS

CLAUDE, *a young actor*
ROSAMUND, *an actress*
TOM, *an actor*
CHARLIE, *a scene-shifter*
A VOICE

SCENE: *The stage of an English Provincial theater.*

TIME: *The present.*

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CLAUDE

The stage of a Provincial theater. The scene is set for a modern play: it is immaterial what it represents: to the left is a settee or a garden-seat, with cushions. A small shabby table, having no connection with the scene, is on the "prompt side": at it sits TOM BLETHWAITE, *scribbling notes. He is a matter-of-fact young man of something more than thirty: bluff and good-humored. He has an attractive voice, somewhat roughened with over-usage. To his right, dressed for going out, is* ROSAMUND, *a self-possessed girl of twenty-five or so: pretty and common-sensible: "a good sort," with no nonsense about her. Her attire is chic.*

ROSAMUND. Will you be long, Tom?

TOM. No, not long. (*He bites the end of his pencil and shoves his hat back from his forehead.*) What's the time?

ROSAMUND. Just turned four. Hurry up. I'm dying for a cup of tea.

TOM. I told them to be back at five—and they're never punctual. If we are able to get on with the second act at five-thirty I shall be surprised.

ROSAMUND. Hurry up, though.

TOM (*scribbling*). Shan't be long. Must make these notes. One forgets. (*Pause. She fidgets.*) How do you think the show's shaping, Rosamund?

ROSAMUND (*doubtfully*). Not so bad. Pretty fair. But it ought to be better, Tom.

TOM. It will be before I've finished with it. It needs quickening up a bit.

ROSAMUND (*hesitating*). I'm not so sure that the cast is right, old thing.

TOM (*looking up, more seriously*). What are you thinking? (*He jumps up.*) I'll stand out like a shot if you think I'm wrong for the part.

ROSAMUND. Oh, you're all right. Topping, in fact. I'm surprised. You've never had a part that suited you better. I'm quite proud of you in it.

TOM (*kissing her*). Darling! You always buck me up. I never seem to have words to say the sort of things I'd like to say to you. I expect other men pour out their flowery tributes. All I can do is to stammer like a bumpkin while all the time my heart is eloquent with love.

ROSAMUND (*laughing*). Well, that's not such a bad effort for a bumpkin. No, old thing: it's not you I'm thinking of, but what's-his-name—Claude Webster. Where did you find him? What has he done? He's so . . . inflated: not a bit natural.

TOM (*with concern*). I'm not too satisfied with him—but he's so deuced earnest. I believe it would break his heart if I asked him to withdraw now. He's a gilded amateur. Full of enthusiasm and no technique. Let's give him his chance.

ROSAMUND. But don't spoil the show for him, Tom. Your heart's too soft, you know.

TOM (*having collected a few odd things from the table and shoved them into his pocket, shouts*). Charlie!

(CHARLIE, *a somewhat slow-moving and lugubrious scene-shifter, appears from Right. He is in his shirt-sleeves.*)

TOM. Strike this scene, will you? We're doing the second act after tea. Have it set by five o'clock.

CHARLIE (*without subservience*). Right, sir. (*He commences to shift the scene, exposing a few old-fashioned flats.*)

TOM. Come along, Rosamund; let's get that tea.

ROSAMUND. I'm famishing.

CHARLIE. Jest a minute, sir.

TOM (*half-way towards Right exit*). Well?

CHARLIE. I [illegible] [illegible] school, sir, but I thought

you ought to know that one of the company's in the 'abit o' doin' a bit on 'is own when everybody else 'as knocked orf. It means keepin' the battens goin'. Thought you ought to know.

TOM. It shows commendable zeal on somebody's part, at any rate. Who is it, Charlie?

CHARLIE. Mr. Webster.

TOM (*to* ROSAMUND). Claude! (*To* CHARLIE.) Well, don't put him off too violently, Charlie; but don't encourage him. Don't let him interfere with your duties, of course, or take up your time unnecessarily; but so long as he doesn't get into harm's way, be gentle with him. (*He laughs.*)

CHARLIE (*grumpily*). Righto.

TOM (*pausing*). We're only going over to the Florence for tea. If Mr. Webster starts rehearsing on his own, just pop over and tell me, will you?

CHARLIE (*ungraciously*). I was goin' out meself. . . .

TOM. Oh, don't let it interfere with your tea—not on any account.

(CHARLIE *has all the time been "striking" the scene, which now presents a dreary appearance.*)

TOM (*laughing, as he and* ROSAMUND *go out.*) Poor old Claude!

(CHARLIE *continues dismantling the stage, whistling mournfully as he does so. Finally he fills his pipe, as he slowly crosses Right and goes off. Within a few seconds there is the sound of an electric switch being shifted and the top-lights go out, leaving only a very dim light on the stage.*

CHARLIE *comes on again, crosses to the foot-lights—which are out—cups his hands, and shouts across the auditorium.*)

CHARLIE. Bill!

VOICE (*from the back of the auditorium*). Well!

CHARLIE. Jest going acrawss the way to get a bit o' grub.

VOICE. Right you are! 'Ave one for me!

CHARLIE. Cheerio! (*He goes slowly back to the Right and off.*)

VOICE *of* CLAUDE (*from left*). I say, Mr. Chapman—Charlie! Don't go.

CHARLIE (*comes just on to the stage and says with intense disapproval*). Is that you, Mr. Webster?

CLAUDE (*coming on from Left*). Yes, it is. Switch on the lights, please.

CHARLIE (*sarcastically*). They've made you boss, 'ave they?

CLAUDE (*plaintively*). Don't be unpleasant, Charlie.

CHARLIE. I'm just going out to tea.

CLAUDE (*impatiently*). I can't talk in the dark. Please switch on the lights, there's a sport.

CHARLIE (*grumbling*). I suppose I must humor him. (*He goes out, switches on the top-lights.* CLAUDE, *a very good-looking, slim and rather sallowy young man of twenty-three, looks round the stage in dismay.* CHARLIE *comes back.*)

CLAUDE. Why, you've struck the scene! Whatever for? We're doing the same scene again after tea.

CHARLIE. That's where you make a mistake, sonny: we're doing Act Two. (*Airily.*) That is, of course, if the Boss knows 'is own business better'n you do, which I ain't sayin'.

CLAUDE. But I *must* have a setting. It makes all the difference.

CHARLIE. The Boss he said strike the scene, so strike the scene I did.

CLAUDE. It's very annoying.

CHARLIE (*on his dignity*). There's only one boss here, mister.

CLAUDE (*soothingly*). Oh, I'm not questioning your right to dismantle the stage. But you do understand, don't you, that one cannot get into the atmosphere of a scene with this sort of lumber littering the place?

CHARLIE. Oh, I dessay. But who'd 'a' thought you'd want to go on rehearsing all on your own? What I know of actors, they're jest as eager to get quit of rehearsing as us wot shifts the scenery.

CLAUDE (*with dignity*). I hope I'm not an ordinary actor. I take my art seriously. I can *not* act without the right

emotional atmosphere—and the backs of those flats put the whole thing out of tune.

CHARLIE (*with an air of long-suffering*). Now look 'ere, young man: I'm old enough to be your father.

CLAUDE (*petulantly*). Please don't speak to me like a father. One's enough.

CHARLIE. I was walkin' the boards before your mother knew she was goin' to 'ave you. Take my tip: don't you go mixing up work and leisure. You study your part when you're at 'ome; do your re'earsing when you're 'ere; and in between-whiles enjoy yourself like any normal young man. Don't come muckin' around the stage when honest stage 'ands wants to go an' 'ave their bit o' grub. The scene's struck. Leave it.

CLAUDE (*peevishly*). It's all very well for you to talk: you don't have to rehearse in a room eight foot by nine, with a bed taking up the greater part of it; no floor space to move in; and a wall decorated with injunctions to the Almighty to save our Home, decorated with cockle-shells in symmetrical patterns. When I rehearse, I want generous space to move in; and above all, I want atmosphere.

CHARLIE. Well, you get all them when the others are re'earsing, don't yer?

CLAUDE. I prefer to develop my part alone. Please, Charlie, don't argue. I have my ways.

CHARLIE (*hurt*). Righto, Cocky: you're welcome to 'em. (*He turns to go.*)

CLAUDE (*plaintively*). If you only knew how nervous I am! When the curtain goes up on the night I shall be like an electric wire, taut and tingling. (*Pleading.*) Won't you even *turn* those flats?

CHARLIE (*grumbling*). I've no right to leave you 'ere at all, all on your own, much less muck about with the scenery. (*He gives a quick glance at the pathetic figure of* CLAUDE.) Oh, aw right, then! (*He turns the flats, revealing some astonishingly ugly specimens of old-fashioned scenic art.* CLAUDE *looks at them and shudders.*)

CLAUDE. Hideous! Leave them as they were.

CHARLIE. Righto, cockywabs. There's no satisfying you. Cheerio! And mind you don't go switching on no more lights.

CLAUDE. I shouldn't know how to.

CHARLIE. Don't go trying. (*He goes out.*)

(*As soon as* CHARLIE *is gone,* CLAUDE, *after a shuddering glance round the stage, braces himself to effort. He takes a tightly rolled MS. from his pocket and turns the pages over rapidly.*)

CLAUDE. That bit, I think. (*He goes off Left. Comes back with heavy footsteps and a tragic demeanor.*)

"Dreading the power of others' scheming wiles,
We cease to utter words that spring unforced . . ."

No. That's too heavy. (*He goes out and after a pause comes back again, this time with a somewhat lightened manner.*)

"Dreading the power of others' scheming wiles,
We cease to utter words . . ."

(*He stops suddenly.*) I can't get it right! If I only knew what it meant! (*He takes the script from his pocket again and finds another passage. Looks round for something to sit on: sees the seat Left, drags it to Center. He then stands behind it, having propped up the cushions to represent an ordinary person, whom he addresses with a rapidly increasing ardor.*)

"Oh, Ammabelle, what words can give the sense
Of this wild rushing sentiment that fain
Would overflow the barriers of reserve?
I love you with each particle of my soul!
My blood flows hot and eager with desire;
My eyes grow bright reflecting your bright eyes;
My hands reach out to clasp you to my breast!
My lips are trembling for the touch of yours!
Oh, Ammabelle, what wisdom is more great
Than love's? Let worldliness be put aside,
And give yourself to me!"

No. (*He repeats with a different intonation.*)

"Oh, Ammabelle, what wisdom is more great
Than Love's? Let worldiness be put aside,
And *give* yourself to me! . . .
And give your*self* to me!"

That's better. That ought to work.

(*He makes various attempts to satisfy himself, speaking the words over the top of the settee: then going to the front of it, and sitting beside the cushions, addresses them. Finally he plunges on to his knees, and as he repeats the following words for the last time he buries his head in the cushions.*)

"And give yourself to me!"

(*During the latter part of this business* CHARLIE *creeps on, followed by* TOM, *and they watch* CLAUDE'S *antics unobserved for some time. Gradually* TOM *finds it impossible to restrain his mirth. He smiles; he titters; he laughs outright. The infection of it arouses even* CHARLIE, *and his laughter, though slower in coming, is finally much more voluminous. For a time,* CLAUDE *is so absorbed in his own business that he is not aware of the newcomers' presence. When he realizes it, he starts violently to his feet, wounded to the quick and covered with confusion.*)

TOM (*controlling himself with an effort*). Excuse me, Claude old thing.

(CLAUDE'S *feelings are too deep for words.* TOM *goes to him and puts his hands in a friendly fashion on his shoulder.*)

Awfully sorry. But you did look a bit of a freak, you know. (*With great seriousness, pulling his face straight.*) But it's jolly decent of you to take all this trouble getting up your part; it shows an unusual keenness. You'll get on. (CLAUDE *says nothing.*) That bit of business just now . . . what exactly were you driving at? I didn't quite get it, somehow. It wasn't quite in keeping, you know. . . . Oh, damn it all, man, don't sulk like a kid that's been smacked!

CLAUDE (*exploding*). I suppose you think you're very smart and very funny, and you imagine I'm spending all my spare

energy on your rotten old play, but you're mistaken on all scores. You're not smart, because it's easy enough to laugh at what you don't understand; and you're not funny, because laughing at somebody else's expense is a sign of ill-breeding and not of humor; and as for your rotten old play, I dismiss the flimsy rubbish from my mind as soon as I leave the rehearsal.

TOM (*half-laughing, but somewhat annoyed*). I envy your flow of words! And so you weren't trying to improve your interpretation of your part? Then you've no right to waste the electric light for which I pay.

(CLAUDE *is stumped by this.* TOM *turns to* CHARLIE.) Run along to the Florence, Charlie, and tell Miss Marlow that I shan't be coming back. (CHARLIE *goes out.* To CLAUDE.) Now, look here, Claude, I'm going to speak to you like a father.

CLAUDE (*hysterically*). I will *not* be spoken to like a father!

TOM (*masterfully*). You shall be spoken to as I wish. I want you to clearly understand that. . . .

CLAUDE (*putting his hands to his ears*). For heaven's sake don't split your infinitives!

TOM. I want you to understand. . . .

CLAUDE. That's better. . . .

TOM. That in this show *I* am the boss.

CLAUDE (*putting on an exaggerated American accent*). And you want me to deliver the goods. All right! Send me the bill for the extra electric light. You can count on me being ready for your rotten show on the night, and as soon as it's failed, we'll part company for ever!

TOM. Yes, my boy; fail it undoubtedly will if you continue giving such a rotten bad show as you've been giving at rehearsals. (CLAUDE *is staggered by this thunder-bolt.*) Yes, I've been lenient with you because I liked you and didn't want to discourage you; but I tell you plainly that so far you've proved [illegible] damned bad actor, and the sooner you realize it the sooner you'll set about improving yourself. Others aren't so lenient as I am.

CLAUDE (*doubtfully*). Miss Marlow doesn't think I'm a bad actor, anyhow.

TOM. As it happens, she thinks you're wrecking the show.

CLAUDE (*his voice breaking*). I don't believe it. Why I . . .

TOM. Don't interrupt. This is my bit. You wait for your cue. Bear in mind that this play we're doing is a play of the twentieth century, not of Queen Anne's time. You've got to move like a man of to-day and speak like a man of to-day—not like the latest product of a girl's school of elocution. D'you see?

CLAUDE. But I . . .

TOM (*not letting him get in a word*). And when you want to move across the stage, you lift your feet like a man: don't slither along like a seal. None of this business. (*He gives an exaggerated imitation of* CLAUDE'S *manner of walking.*)

CLAUDE. I *don't* walk like that! Just because I happen to be naturally more graceful than you. . . .

TOM (*breaking in*). And when you're supposed to be making love to the girl, don't linger over your words as if you were loth to let them go, but snap them out as modern men making love do snap them out. Girls have no use for that sort of affectation nowadays, and this is a modern play. Don't forget that.

CLAUDE (*superciliously*). I suppose you think you know a lot about what girls like and don't like. Because you yourself only come in contact with the blunted unimaginative type, you like to think the other type doesn't exist. But you're wrong. Every girl worth the winning prefers to be wooed with fine words and imaginative utterance. Modern life is empty enough of romance for dullards like you, but people like me—poets and lovers—still have the grace to be romantic and to bring color into daily life.

TOM. Righto, sonny. Leave it at that. But you keep romance out of this modern comedy or keep yourself out of the cast altogether! (*He goes off Left, throwing a final word over his shoulder.*) D'you understand?

CLAUDE (*shouting after him*). I shall be delighted to do both.

(*He edges towards Left with each word.*) Some day you will be begging me to join your wretched company—when my name is on the top of all the bills, and a streamer on all the bus-tops. And you won't *get* me then. See?

(*He comes slowly and disconsolately back to Center. Picks up the script and shoves it into his pocket. Goes to the seat, prods a cushion with his fist, arranges it on the back of the seat, sits down and leans back, his hands deep in his trousers' pockets, an air of nonchalance on his face. He purses his lips and a low whistle escapes from them.* ROSAMUND *comes in from Right. He turns round hastily, and rises.*)

ROSAMUND. You look depressed.

CLAUDE (*lightly*). Not at all.

ROSAMUND. You *look* depressed, was all I said.

CLAUDE (*without conviction*). But I'm not: not at all.

ROSAMUND. Why hasn't the stage been set?

CLAUDE. I'm not the scene-shifter.

ROSAMUND. Diddums. Is it cross, then?

CLAUDE (*suddenly pathetic*). Please don't make fun of me, Miss Marlow. I'm so tired of being made fun of.

ROSAMUND (*pushing the hair back from his eyes*). Who's been making fun of you, poor boy?

CLAUDE. Blethwaite.

ROSAMUND. Tom? Impossible! He's the kindest man on earth!

CLAUDE (*pettishly*). Oh, is he? He pulled my interpretation to shreds. Said it was all wrong and I'd better leave the cast if I can't do it better.

ROSAMUND. That *was* unkind. And you didn't do anything to provoke him?

CLAUDE. No—nothing to speak of. He said my interpretation was too romantic.

ROSAMUND (*tactfully*). Well, perhaps it is just a *thought* too romantic.

CLAUDE. But I *am* romantic.

ROSAMUND. Of course you are, and it's very charming of you;

but the modern young man isn't romantic, you know, and in the play you're supposed to be a modern young man.

CLAUDE. *You* think that too, do you?

ROSAMUND (*sitting down on the seat*). Let's sit down and talk about it. Perhaps I can give you a tip or two. I've been at it longer than you, you know.

CLAUDE (*sitting beside her*). I'd take it better from you than from him. He's such a heavy unimaginative creature. You're wonderful. I sometimes look at you acting with him and wonder how you can endure it. You are all fire within and never get a chance to let it out.

ROSAMUND (*smiling indulgently*). Oh, but fire isn't wanted in a modern comedy, silly.

CLAUDE. But it is in life. (*Fervently.*) Even in life, I feel, you suppress all that fever of emotion that is struggling for expression in you.

ROSAMUND (*somewhat intrigued*). I wonder.

CLAUDE. Tom Blethwaite is all right, I daresay, for the commonplace daily round: but what about the peaks of experience, when the whole being is tuned up to the highest pitch and ready to respond to the least appropriate stimulus? Surely, Miss Marlow, you know what that means? I *am* romantic and glory in it. If I may not put it into practice in my daily life, then I shall pour it into my work. I have written a play, which I shall produce myself and play the leading part.

ROSAMUND. That *will* be nice.

CLAUDE. Don't scoff! Don't you see that you were destined for finer things, Miss Marlow? I know you better than you know yourself. I've sometimes longed to get beneath the surface of your calm, your cruel modern calm. (*He grows fervent again.*) There is some great unknown power in you which attracts even while it repels. You are a dangerous woman.

ROSAMUND (*a little pleased*). I? Why? . . .

CLAUDE. Yes, you—more dangerous than you know, because

you have not yet allowed the real You to express itself. (*With awe-filled fervor.*) Rosamund . . .

ROSAMUND (*edging away*). Isn't that a little familiar?

CLAUDE. How can I call you Miss Marlow? Rosamund—haven't you guessed my secret?

ROSAMUND (*uneasily*). No, I can't say that I knew you had one.

CLAUDE. I will keep it no longer. Rosamund—I love you.

ROSAMUND. Nonsense.

CLAUDE. I love you, love you! (*He continues with tremendously increasing ardor and* ROSAMUND *is more and more impressed.*) Every minute of the day I think about you: every minute of the night I dream about you. My thoughts are always with you. Don't you feel them clinging about you? Don't they awaken any response in you? My God! It is unbearable to be in your company and be forbidden to express even a tiny part of my feelings for you.

ROSAMUND. But, really, I'd not the slightest inkling of all this. Are you sure you're not making a mistake? Do you take me for somebody else? Don't let your romantic feelings run away with you, Claude.

CLAUDE (*gloomily*). You repulse me?

ROSAMUND. Well, I wouldn't say that.

CLAUDE. Tell me what you feel towards me.

ROSAMUND. I don't know that I could do that.

CLAUDE (*rhythmically*). "Dreading the power of others' scheming wiles . . ."

ROSAMUND. Now don't go quoting Shakespeare at me!

CLAUDE (*dwelling on the word*). Shakespeare! No, Rosamund, I shall not quote Shakespeare. What need have I to seek others' words, when words pour out full-blooded from my brain? Oh, Rosamund!

(*As he says the following words, he does exactly the same business as he did when discovered by* TOM.)

"Oh, Rosamund, what words can give the sense of this wild rushing sentiment that you would overflow the barriers of reserve?"

ROSAMUND (*faintly*). I haven't noticed the reserve.

CLAUDE. "I love you with each particle of my soul! My blood flows hot and eager with desire; my eyes grow bright reflecting your bright eyes; my hands reach out to clasp you to my breast; my lips are trembling for the touch of yours! Oh, Rosamund, what wisdom is more great than love's? Let worldliness be put aside and give yourself to me!" (*At this point he has buried his head in her lap, and she, moved almost in spite of herself, has let her hands fall on his head and her fingers toy with his hair.*)

ROSAMUND. My dear boy, I had no idea you felt like this about me. I'm not used to this sort of out-pouring, you know. What shall I say?

TOM (*outside*). Charlie! (*He comes on. Simultaneously* CLAUDE *springs to his feet, not however until* TOM *has taken in the situation.* ROSAMUND *becomes suddenly stiff and does not look round. An expression of pain comes over* TOM'S *face.*) I intrude. (*He turns to go out Left.*)

CLAUDE (*suavely*). Not at all.

TOM (*after a pause*). When a man has his head in a woman's lap and she toys with his hair, there is no place for a second man.

CLAUDE (*as before*). Don't be theatrical!

(TOM *makes a scornful but inarticulate ejaculation and starts to go off Right.*)

What right have you to be so put out?

TOM (*laughing in a hollow manner*). Right? Oh, none whatever! I'm not complaining. . . . I beg your pardon for intruding. (*He is going out.*)

ROSAMUND. Tom! (*He stops.*) I am sorry. (*She does not turn.*)

TOM. There is no need to be sorry. You are your own mistress, I hope. If you prefer him to me, that's an end of it, so far as I am concerned.

ROSAMUND. But . . . (*She gets up and goes to* TOM.) It is strange: he has a curious way. . . . (*She puts her hand tentatively on* TOM'S *arm: he does not respond.*) I was almost

. . . Oh, Tom, don't make it so hard! (*He says nothing.* CLAUDE *looks on all the time with a slightly curling lip.*) Oh, if you're going to be grumpy about it, I'll say no more. (*She turns away from him. Something seems to snap in him. He turns to her and clasps her passionately in his arms.*)

TOM. Oh, my darling, my darling! I couldn't bear to let you go. I know I'm a great lumbering dullard, without wisdom or words, unworthy of you . . . but I love you, my dear, I do love you. Don't let me lose you . . .

ROSAMUND (*with a fluttering breath*). Oh, Tom, you great silly, there was never the least fear of it. Of course, I love you. But the words of this young rascal have a power of their own, all unconnected with their meaning. Claude, come here! (CLAUDE *goes to her.*) Say you're sorry.

CLAUDE. I'm not sorry. I'm glad.

TOM. Glad of what?

CLAUDE. Glad that you've made it up.

ROSAMUND (*dumbfounded—short pause*). Oh!

CLAUDE (*perkily, to* TOM). Can I act?

TOM (*indulgently*). You have the seeds. You will in time.

CLAUDE (*to* ROSAMUND). Can I act?

ROSAMUND. No, Claude: I'm afraid you can't, notwithstanding Tom.

CLAUDE. What is the essence of acting?

ROSAMUND. To make an audience forget that you're acting. The very last thing you'd be capable of.

CLAUDE. Oh. (*He thoughtfully takes the manuscript out of his pocket. Turns the pages until he finds the right passage. Then hands it to* TOM, *pointing.*) Read that! It is my new play.

TOM (*wonderingly, declaims with exaggerated feeling*): "Oh, Ammabelle . . ."

ROSAMUND (*airily*). I don't like the name, Claude.

CLAUDE. Nor I, either. I prefer Rosamund. Substitute Rosamund, Tom.

TOM.

"Oh, Rosamund, what words can give the sense
Of this wild rushing sentiment that fain
Would overflow the barriers of reserve?
I love you with each particle of my soul!"

(*And so on to the end of the passage.* TOM'S *fervor waxes.* ROSAMUND'S *eyes grow wider and wider with wonder, annoyance, and finally amusement.* CLAUDE'S *glee is unbounded.* ROSAMUND *runs at him and pummels him.*)

CLAUDE (*eluding her blows*). Can I act? Who said I couldn't act?

QUICK CURTAIN

THE IDEALIST

BY

OLIPHANT DOWN

OLIPHANT DOWN

Oliphant Down was born in 1885 at Bridgewater, Somersetshire, and was educated at Warminster School in Wiltshire. He first came to London in 1902 and went to work in an office for a few years, after which he became a journalist and professional writer. He enlisted in the British Army in 1914 and in May, 1917, was killed in France. Down is the author of half a dozen one-act plays of a fantastic and poetic character, among which *The Maker of Dreams* is undoubtedly the most popular. *Wealth and Wisdom* and *The Idealist,* however, are outstanding examples of the author's talent as a commentator on human character and a writer of entertaining and poetic plays.

Published plays: *The Maker of Dreams; The Quod Wrangle; Tommy-by-the-Way; Bal Masque; Wealth and Wisdom; The Idealist.*

CHARACTERS

VASHTI ENCOMBE
MRS. MAYSTER (MURIEL)
RICHARD WARRINGTON
SERVANT

SCENE: *Drawing-room of Vashti Encombe's home, Notting Hill, London.*

TIME: *The present.*

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THE IDEALIST

Drawing-room of VASHTI ENCOMBE'S *maisonette, Notting Hill. It is a comfortably furnished room, displaying moderate though not cheap taste. At the back on the extreme left is a wide single door which when opened displays a corridor backing. On the right of the same wall is set a French window. A fireplace right, in which a fire is burning, completes the fixtures. Below the fireplace a writing-table stands against the wall, whilst above there is an armchair a yard or two from the wall. On the left in the foreground is a sofa with double ends, and a trifle to the right of center is another armchair corresponding to that above the fire. On the extreme left there stands a curious three-tier gong upon an ordinary small drawing-room table. Customary furniture, pictures, etc., to complete.*

It is four o'clock on a November afternoon.

VASHTI *discovered at writing-table, scribbling a note.*

(*Enter* SERVANT.)

SERVANT. Mrs. Mayster.

(*Enter* MURIEL. *She is dressed as if she had been playing golf and carries bag of clubs.*)

VASHTI. Oh, how tiresome!

MURIEL. You are not referring to me by any chance?

VASHTI. This is unfortunate—to-day of all days! Muriel, you mustn't stay.

MURIEL (*depositing golf clubs*). I don't intend to.

VASHTI. Of course I'm awfully glad to see you, but really —really, I don't want you this afternoon.

MURIEL. I'm so glad. (*Sits.*) For I've a lot of things to do. But I can spare you a few moments. Now what is it?

VASHTI. What's what?

MURIEL. Oh, you'll never get rid of me at that rate. Come, tell me what deviltry there is toward.

VASHTI. I refuse to make you an accomplice.

MURIEL. Ah! then I shall stay and make myself one.

VASHTI. I *shall* be so rude to you presently!

MURIEL. Don't let that worry you. I promise you I won't take offense at anything you say or do.

(VASHTI *walks up and down in her agitation.*)

VASHTI (*stopping*). Can you keep a secret?

MURIEL. Rather!

VASHTI. So can I! (*Continues to walk. Again stops.*) Oh, Muriel, Muriel, will you go?

MURIEL. No.

VASHTI. Hg! What would you do if I rang the bell and ordered you to be shown out?

MURIEL. Probably make a fool of you before your own maid.

VASHTI. Oh, you are a little beast!

MURIEL. There, you see I'm not the least bit angry. Wouldn't telling me all about it be the simplest plan? You're using the wrong club, you know. You can't get over a bunker with a putter.

VASHTI (*undecided*). Oh, aren't you just dying to hear it!

MURIEL. And you're just as dying to tell me.

VASHTI. Muriel, be a sport. You've lost your ball and you must stand on one side and let the next players pass through.

MURIEL. What a lot of time we are wasting.

VASHTI (*sweetly and rather suddenly*). I can hardly realize that you've been married five whole weeks.

MURIEL. What's that got to do with it?

VASHTI. Nothing, except that, having obtained your heart's desire, you won't grudge me mine.

MURIEL. Oh, you dear! Who is it?

VASHTI. It isn't—yet. That's the point.

MURIEL. Who is it? And how is it the point?

VASHTI. Well, he's coming here this afternoon, and I——

MURIEL. Who's coming?

VASHTI. Dick Warrington! Don't interrupt. You see, I don't want you to be here.

MURIEL. I thought you and Dick had drifted apart.

VASHTI. So we have. I've not seen him for three months. But this afternoon I'm going to pin him down. I'll flatter him as I used to and say there never was such a poet. Have you ever read his poetry?

MURIEL. No.

VASHTI. Thank your stars! One day I fell asleep when he was reading some to me, though I'm not quite sure whether he found it out. But this afternoon I'll feed upon his wish to be immortal until he'll ask me to share his fame with him.

MURIEL. He *must* be a fool if he takes that bait.

VASHTI. All men are fools! That's our saving chance. Besides, he has always swallowed it like a lamb. It'll mean a break-up of his ideas, though, for it'll prove indisputably the old tag that when a woman makes up her mind, there's not much more to be said.

MURIEL. So you have argued that with him?

VASHTI. Oh, my dear, I never argue. If you want your own way with men, you must give in to them. Victory always makes them feel like brutes. And when a man says, "I've been a brute," he's yours; even the cleverest of them; and Dick is as green as grass.

MURIEL (*dubiously*). Well, I hope you may succeed. But there are more matches lost on the green than this world wots of.

VASHTI (*seriously*). I say, you are not misunderstanding me, are you?

MURIEL. Misunderstanding?

VASHTI. Well, misjudging? You don't think me utterly callous, just a husband-hunter?

MURIEL. Oh, my dear!

VASHTI. Think what I've done for this man. Do you remember his baggy rousers, his floppy Bohemian hat? Will you

ever be able to forget his big straggly tie? Muriel, I *made* Dick Warrington; socially, I *made* him.

MURIEL. You positively frighten me!

VASHTI. You know I'm not really heartless. I taught him what love was; he hadn't an idea of the feminine sex before I opened his eyes to their manifold blessings. I've let him go his own way; carry on as he liked with other girls, given him plenty of rope. But now I haul it in. This afternoon he is coming to the corral. I'm going to lasso him and check him with a quick turn round the snubbing-post and brand him mine. I have reasons for doing it at once. He's beginning to feel the springy turf under his hoofs, and unless I play cowboy he'll be off. Muriel, I never knew until quite recently how fond I was of him. Not until I saw him neglecting me for others; but I hide my real feelings under a flippant mask, for I can't be genuinely sentimental. Sometimes I quite despise myself; I'm always acting various moods. To Dick I adopt a high, poetic tone.

MURIEL. But I know you to be quite genuine.

VASHTI. You generally see me as I really am.

MURIEL. I believe I do, and that's why I wish you every success.

VASHTI. Now don't you grow sentimental. Oh, I thought of such a fine speech last night as I was getting into bed. I was so struck with it, I spent half an hour rehearsing it then and there. I've got it perfect in word and gesture. When Dick asks me to marry him I shall take two or three steps away from him—like this—and then I'll let him have it with all the histrionic power at my command. (*Sits in arm-chair.*)

MURIEL. *Do* let me hear it.

VASHTI. It's most awe-inspiring. It's absolute poetry. I believe it was an inspiration intended for the brain of some poet, only I somehow intercepted the ether wave.

MURIEL. Oh, let me hear it!

VASHTI. Would you like to? (*Rises from chair and takes two or three steps as she had previously indicated and turns*

majestically. She is about to deliver speech, but stops.) No, Muriel: there are some things too sacred even for the ear of friendship.

MURIEL. Bosh, you humbug! Mind, I hold the key to the situation.

VASHTI. Heavens! It's after four o'clock. He said he would be here at four. You must go.

MURIEL. All right. I'll leave you discreetly enough when he arrives.

VASHTI. No, no, that would spoil everything! It would be so pointed it would put him on his guard.

MURIEL. Well, let me have the speech and I'll go at once.

(*Enter* SERVANT.)

SERVANT. Mr. Warrington.

VASHTI. There!

(*Enter* RICHARD. *He is dressed in conventional calling garb and is wearing an overcoat.* SERVANT *goes out.*)

VASHTI. So you managed to find the way?

RICHARD. Is that a reproach? Ah, Miss Hanger.

VASHTI. Mrs. Mayster, Dick. Excuse me a moment, I must finish this note. (*Sits at writing-table.*)

RICHARD (*to* MURIEL). I beg your pardon; I hadn't heard.

MURIEL. Married five weeks, Mr. Warrington. I'm wearing the chains wonderfully well, don't you think?

RICHARD. Ah! they haven't begun to eat into your soul yet.

MURIEL. You horrid man. I positively won't stay another minute.

VASHTI (*annoyed at the artlessness*). Oh, Muriel!

MURIEL. But I must go. I have a dinner party this evening. Just a foursome. My partner will be wild if I foozle it.

RICHARD. As keen on golf as ever?

MURIEL. Rather! But matrimony runs it very close. I'm at home next Tuesday; you'll come; it's my first.

RICHARD. I'm no Cinquevalli with a cup and saucer.

MURIEL. Oh, but think how gracefully you'd handle a cake-stand.

RICHARD. No, it behooves me to be absent on account of my theory.

MURIEL (*after a slight pause*). Come along; we're still waiting for the epigram.

RICHARD (*sheepishly*). I was merely going to remark that given two or more ladies and some tea, you'd shake a low churchman's disbelief in the devil.

MURIEL. H'm! You ought to publish that in four volumes.

VASHTI. I knew he was afraid of your tea shots.

RICHARD. On the contrary, my absence will show that I have no fear. You may pick me to pieces as you like. My character is above suspicion.

MURIEL. I'm *so* glad, for I'm sure it wouldn't bear inspection.

RICHARD (*with mock despair*). You worst me at every point.

MURIEL. I forgive you on account of my triumph then. (*To* VASHTI.) Victory doesn't make a woman feel a brute, does it, dear?

VASHTI. No, Muriel, a woman glories in it. You see it is what we always fight for.

RICHARD. And what does a man fight for if not for——

MURIEL. A man fights in order not to be conquered. Keep a stout heart through life, Mr. Warrington. (*To* VASHTI.) Of course you'll come on Tuesday. I shall want to hear all about your—prize competition.

VASHTI. My—? Oh, I'll send you a wire as soon as the result is known.

MURIEL. That would be sweet of you. Oh, you must not delay me any longer. Every minute imperils my domestic happiness. Never be so cruel to our sex, Mr. Warrington, as to marry one of us. (*She holds out her hand.*)

RICHARD. I should be less cynical if I could believe you.

MURIEL (*to* VASHTI). Oh, this man insults me. Good-bye, dear. (VASHTI *rings bell. To* RICHARD) I think you ought to come on Tuesday to apologize. Yes, I shall expect you!

(SERVANT *appears at door.*)

RICHARD (*Soothing*). Wild horses won't drag me there!

MURIEL. I wasn't pinning my faith to wild horses, so au revoir.

VASHTI. Would you mind leaving this note as you're passing, Muriel?

MURIEL (*taking the note*). Where am I——

VASHTI (*impatientlty*). I've addressed it.

MURIEL (*with mock surprise*). *So* you have! Remember, Tuesday the twenty-fifth, Mrs. Leonard Mayster at home (MURIEL *and* SERVANT *go out.*)

VASHTI. Quite like old times to see you again, Dick. Won't you take off your coat? I hate talking to you in outdoor costume, as if you were a casual caller.

RICHARD. Thanks—may I put it here?

VASHTI. Of course; throw it down anywhere. What does it matter?

RICHARD. It matters a great deal to my coat.

VASHTI. Now, Dick, you are beginning to think a lot too much about clothes. You used not to be like that when I first knew you.

RICHARD. You can't expect me to always remain an out-at-elbows idealist.

VASHTI. Ah! and what an idealist you were.

RICHARD. You needn't bring it up against me.

VASHTI. Bring it up against you! You ought to be proud of it. I shall never forget the wonderful look that used to come into your eyes at times, as if you had "fed on honey dew and drunk the milk of paradise."

RICHARD. I didn't know you were a reader of Coleridge.

VASHTI. Oh, Dick, don't be so absurd. Don't you remember that exquisite leather-bound copy you gave me? I think he is my favorite poet.

RICHARD. H'm. He used to be mine once.

VASHTI. I remember, and how you used to read "Kubla Khan" to me.

RICHARD. And how you went to sleep.

VASHTI. I never went to sleep over Coleridge.

RICHARD. I suppose it was only my own efforts that sent you drowsing.

VASHTI. Now, Dick, that was only once, and I had been dancing all the night before.

RICHARD. You confess you did fall asleep. (*Despairingly.*) I always suspected it.

VASHTI. I was so tired. How could I keep awake?

RICHARD (*bitterly*). So with the world. Sleep first. Art second. Oh, how I wish I could make you appreciate the wonderful, the mystical, the divine immortality of art.

VASHTI. Ah, there speaks the idealist in you once again. That is the old Richard of our first acquaintance. Why do you want to change and throw off all your romance?

RICHARD. I was a fool in those days, Vashti.

VASHTI. Oh, no, I'm sure you weren't. The beautiful ideas you used to have——

RICHARD. Mad, impossible ideas.

VASHTI. That is why they were so beautiful. You looked upon the world as a herd of swine and made up your mind that you would soar above them. I am afraid you rather seek the company of the pigs now.

RICHARD. Because purses are made of pigskin, Vashti.

VASHTI. Oh, Richard!

RICHARD. It's no use talking like that. I know that you don't believe in me. I know that you never did believe in me. I, with my poems, was nothing to you but a dreamer that you loved to flatter, just to make me kneel at your feet.

VASHTI. Well, what are your new ideas? Coleridge I know is off. Who is it now? Byron? Swinburne? Surely it can't be Kipling?

RICHARD. Poetry has gone by the board. I've grown too cynical. So I've adopted the only field where cynicism is allowed. I now write plays.

VASHTI. How splendid. Tell me some of the plots.

RICHARD. Oh, I have dispensed with plots. My plays are built up on character studies.

VASHTI. What a wonderful idea! You'll make a great name. I can see your heroes and heroines unfolding their characters gradually, their eloquent words surely carried to the hearts of the people on a sweet flood of soft music from the orchestra.

RICHARD. Soft music! Oh, Vashti, I thought better of you!

VASHTI. What is the matter?

RICHARD (*in a frenzy*). Do we carry on our daily lives to the accompaniment of soft music? It is preposterous. It is simply monstrous to introduce such an exotic element into the drama. I tell you——

VASHTI. Ah, yes, Dick. I remember now. You never were a believer in music as a soul stirrer.

RICHARD. What influence can it have over one's feelings?

VASHTI. Ah, forgive my ignorance.

RICHARD. No, forgive me. You are just one of the members of the British public. I could hardly expect you to understand the drama. You think too much of the heart and too little of the intellect.

VASHTI. I am only a woman, you know.

RICHARD. Is that self-praise or self-disparagement?

VASHTI (*modestly*). I leave that entirely to you, Richard.

RICHARD (*annoyed*). When you are sentimental you always call me Richard.

VASHTI. Well, Dick, then. Come, don't let us have any little differences to-day of all days.

RICHARD. Why, what is there special about to-day?

VASHTI. Oh, have you forgotten, Richard—— I beg your pardon, I mean Dick?

RICHARD. I can't say "forgotten." I don't think I ever knew.

VASHTI. It is just a year ago that we first met. Twelve months!

RICHARD. Fifty-two weeks, three hundred and sixty-five days, heaven knows how many hours, minutes and seconds.

VASHTI. I don't know what authority you have for supposing heaven to be mathematical.

RICHARD. Ah, good! I like you better when you are matter of fact. It's more honest.

VASHTI. Then I'll be matter of fact.

RICHARD. And I shall call you by your real name—Sarah.

VASHTI. Richard!

RICHARD. Well, I couldn't call you Vashti any more.

VASHTI. But you gave me that name yourself.

RICHARD. Yes, in the old days when I believed in you. I was in love with Vashti, my intangible goddess.

VASHTI. Ah, Richard!

RICHARD. But Sarah is my *friend*.

VASHTI. Yes, *Dick*. (*A pause.*) How we have changed. I used to be half in love with—oh, not Dick Warrington—but Richard the dreamer. Yes, we have changed.

RICHARD. I am so glad to hear you say this. I was afraid—I had led you to think that I was in love with you, and that you might have fallen in love with me.

VASHTI. Oh, what a conceited thing to say. You must think a lot of yourself.

RICHARD (*hedging*). You misunderstand me. Of course I know I'm not good looking——

VASHTI. Oh, it is a man's privilege to be plain.

RICHARD (*sadly*). I sometimes think that I abuse the privilege.

VASHTI (*bantering ly*). And so you thought I was in love with you. Ah, well, I forgive you, though I ought really to be very angry. But the whole idea is too absurd. (*Laughs.*)

RICHARD (*indignant*). Why?

VASHTI. And now I have hurt your dignity. Oh, I should make it worse if I entered into details.

RICHARD. I think you are unnecessarily rude.

VASHTI. Matter-of-fact Sarah must speak her mind. And you absolutely asked for it.

RICHARD. Hgh!

VASHTI. Now you're angry! (*Pretending that the matter occurs to her in a new light.*) Were—were you in earnest?

Was it really your way of asking me to marry you? Oh, have I hurt you by my blunt refusals?

RICHARD. Of course not! You're talking nonsense. I did not ask you to marry me. I'm not in love with you. Never was.

VASHTI. Oh, come——

RICHARD. I was once in love with Vashti.

VASHTI. You mean Richard the dreamer was—eh, Richard? Ah, well, we can't quarrel over a point we both agree on. Let's say no more.

RICHARD. Yes! There's a little more I should like to say, just in order to deal fairly with you. I have abused your friendship. I used it as a means to study your character in order that I might make you the central figure in a play. (*Producing manuscript.*)

VASHTI (*hotly*). Oh, you had no right!

RICHARD. I plead the divine right of Art.

VASHTI. I am honored in being led before the British public by so illustrious a hand. Oh, to betray my friendship in such a manner! Everyone will recognize me.

RICHARD. On the contrary, everyone will applaud my genius but positively assert that such a character is impossible. That is always the verdict on psychologic masterpieces. But think of this: when all the world is arguing whether the character is lifelike or not, holding debates about it on Sunday evenings, only you and I will know the truth. Doesn't that make up for it all?

VASHTI. Of course, Richard. I wasn't really angry.

RICHARD. I'm so glad.

(*There is quite an awkward pause.*)

VASHTI. Oh, by the way, I meant to ask you your opinion of this Indian gong. I bought it only last week at Liberty's.

RICHARD. It looks very pagan.

VASHTI. Try the tone of it. Oh, harder, much harder—you won't break it. That's better. (*As the vibrations die away, music is heard from other side of the wall.*)

RICHARD. What's that?

VASHTI. What?

RICHARD. That music.

VASHTI. Oh! (*Laughing.*) Only two friends of mine next door. Such nice girls. You would like them.

RICHARD. Do you often have to endure this?

VASHTI. Don't you like it?

RICHARD. No, I don't. (*A pause.*)

VASHTI. They're awfully keen on the theater. They go to all the musical comedies.

RICHARD (*hotly*). I detest musical comedy. It is a cancer and a menace to the Brit —— (*His denunciation has flagged in vindictiveness.*) They don't play badly. (*A pause.*)

(VASHTI *looks furtively round, and seeing that he is getting under the music's influence, at once adopts a suitable pose and murmurs dreamily:*)

VASHTI. How this music steals over one.

RICHARD (*coming down—he has been standing by gong before*). Vashti, I've been a brute. (*She claps her hands and gives a low sigh of complete satisfaction.*) I've carried my coarse pleasantries too far. I've tried to pretend that I didn't care for you. I've fought against it. I have sold the best of my manhood to obtain dramatic effects, but it was all a hollow pretence. Vashti, Vashti, look up at me. (*He is talking over the back of her chair.*) I love you! I want you! Oh, why don't you speak?

VASHTI. You are not appealing to Sarah.

RICHARD. Oh, drive Sarah to the four winds of heaven! I am appealing to Vashti.

VASHTI (*rising and walking two or three steps away from him, as she has previously indicated*). Richard, I know what you want. You wish me to close my eyes in an ecstatic rhapsody and say, "To-day I have found a great love." Oh, believe me, I have found nothing; but I have lost—everything. Before, I was an individual, possessing my own soul, controlling my own destiny, but you have destroyed my individuality and I must come to you for support.

RICHARD. It is enough.

VASHTI. You do believe in the triumph of the heart over the intellect?

RICHARD. I always have.

VASHTI. And you will burn that play?

RICHARD. Together we will consign it to the flames. (*They go to the fireplace. He places it on the fire. It burns.*) The souls of Dick and Sarah are passing up the chimney in thin blue smoke.

(*Enter* SERVANT.)

SERVANT. If you please, Miss, the young ladies say they can't play any more now, as they have to go out, and they hope it was sufficient.

VASHTI (*sharply*). Thank you! You may go!

RICHARD. Wait! What is the meaning of this?

VASHTI. You are not going to question my maid?

(RICHARD *looks at her for a moment, and then to* SERVANT *reprovingly:*)

RICHARD. Your mistress said you could go.

(SERVANT *goes out.*)

RICHARD. So that music was a trap for me?

VASHTI. A trap? What do you mean?

RICHARD. You gave orders for them to play.

VASHTI. Me! Why should I? What effect could it have?

RICHARD. Speak the truth. Shatter my ideals if you must, but let me have the truth.

VASHTI (*rising grandiloquently to the occasion*). Yes, that note Muriel took was to ask them to play when they heard the sound of the gong. *You* sounded the gong. It was *your* hand that bade them play. That was dramatic! (RICHARD *gives vent to an exclamation of horror.*) I have had my revenge.

RICHARD. You have deceived me. You to whom I have always acted straightly. You have had recourse to subterfuge. I thought I had found a woman all perfect——

VASHTI. And you find me only a perfect woman.

RICHARD. Oh, how could you!

VASHTI (*taking the lapels of his coat*). Because I wanted you.

At least you must acknowledge you are going to marry a woman with ideas.

RICHARD. I shall never lift up my head again. To have deceived *me*, who have never deceived you by word or action.

VASHTI. What is this rustling in your pocket? (*She draws out another manuscript from his breast pocket and opens it.*) This is another copy of that play! Oh, you have boasted that you have always dealt straightly with me. You make a parade of burning your play, while you have a duplicate copy in your pocket.

RICHARD. Give it to me!

VASHTI (*ignoring*). This, then, is your vaunted straightness. I was merely clever, but you have stooped to dishonesty. And I believed in you so much. I think I shall never lift up my head again.

RICHARD. I claimed that privilege of sorrow first.

VASHTI. Don't make a jest of it.

RICHARD. Vashti, I will not harbor bitter thoughts. I forgive you. At least you must acknowledge you are going to marry a man who is no fool.

VASHTI. I am going to marry Dick after all——

RICHARD. Who is in love with Sarah. (*There is no embrace, merely a warm shaking of all four hands.*)

VASHTI. Oh, by the way. I promised to send a telegram to Muriel about—— Oh, never mind what. You can send it for me.

RICHARD. Of course.

VASHTI. Say, "All square at the first tee."

CURTAIN

AT THE TELEPHONE

BY

ANDRÉ DE LORDE

ANDRÉ DE LORDE

Andre de Lorde, born in France in 1871, is the most conspicuous exponent of the Grand Guignol "Thriller" School of dramatists. He has, in more than a hundred plays, devoted himself almost exclusively to the exploitation of the theme of terror.

Of these the most famous is *Au Téléphone,* here translated for the the first time into English.

Published plays (only English translations noted): *The Woman Who Was Acquitted; At the Telephone.*

CHARACTERS

ANDRÉ MAREX, *aged forty-five.*
MARTHA MAREX, *his wife, aged thirty*
BLAISE, *an old manservant, aged sixty*
NANETTE, *an old servant, aged sixty*
LITTLE PIERRE MAREX, *aged six*
A TRAMP, *under twenty*
RIVOIRE, *a friend of Marex, aged fifty*
JUSTIN, *a manservant, aged thirty*
LUCIENNE RIVOIRE, *Rivoire's wife, aged thirty*

SCENE: *At the Château de la Chesnaye, and at Rivoire's home.*

TIME: *The nineties.*

At the Telephone [illegible] by André de Lorde and Charles Foley. All acting rights, professional and amateur, are reserved in the United States, Great Britain, and all countries of the copyright union, by the owner. Performances forbidden and right of presentation reserved. Application for the right of performing this play or reading it in public should be made to Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York City.

AT THE TELEPHONE

Scene 1

A country house. A large sitting-room on the ground floor, French window at back opening on to the park. A smaller window on each side of the French window; doors Right and Left. At Left a fireplace with lighted fire. Between the fireplace and the footlights, a telephone apparatus is fastened to the wall. At Right, table, arm-chairs, chairs, a writing table in the corner.

As the curtain rises the old servant NANETTE *is discovered sitting by the hearth with little* PIERRE *on her lap. He is turning over the pages of a picture book.* MAREX, *in traveling costume, is just putting away some papers into the open writing table.* MARTHA, *his wife, is wrapping up some small objects and putting them into a bag which is on the table.*

MAREX (*stopping and listening*). Is that the carriage?

MARTHA (*going to window*). Eh? No, it isn't.

MAREX. Isn't he late?

MARTHA. He's punctual enough as a rule.

MAREX. Where did you order the carriage?

MARTHA. From Perrin's as usual. (*Coming back to table.*) Nanette ordered it.

NANETTE. I went there myself. I saw the order written down.

MARTHA (*looks at watch*). You have plenty of time.

MAREX (*looks at clock*). I shall only just make it.

MARTHA. It's only twenty minutes' drive to the station.

MAREX. I had better start on foot. (*Going up to window.*)

NANETTE. Oh, no, Monsieur, there's plenty of time. It's a fast horse.

MAREX. If it's not here in a minute or two I had better give up all thoughts of going——

MARTHA. It's sure to come.

MAREX. If I miss the train I shall be in a pretty fix. If I am not in Paris to-morrow to meet Muller, the business will fall through—a dead loss—ten thousand francs——

MARTHA. Does this business mean as much as that?

MAREX. Yes, and a bit more, I hope.

MARTHA. It is important. Ah! (*Looking out of window.*) I thought that was the fly. (*Anxiously.*) If they had a telephone at the stable, we could find out whether they had started.

MAREX. If it has not started now, it will be too late; and besides, they have no telephone; no one else has one at Servon—God-forsaken hole. A telephone! they don't even know what such a thing is.

MARTHA (*looking at clock on mantelpiece*). Six o'clock.

MAREX. Ah! if I only had that driver here! Listen. I am going to start on foot. Blaise can carry my bag—I shall be there before the fly gets here. (*The rain and wind increase.*)

NANETTE. But, Monsieur, listen! It is pouring torrents.

MARTHA. It's awful weather.

MAREX. Yes, it's coming down—beautiful September weather! We came to the country to breathe the fresh air, go out for long walks, and for three weeks we haven't been able to get our noses outside the door. Detestable place. I have come to hate it.

MARTHA (*closes bag*). We shan't come back here for our next holidays.

MAREX. Rather not. And so inconvenient, too! Damp, dull. The town is dirty, no means of communication——

NANETTE. And so far away from everything! If we wanted to get anything—if anyone were taken ill in the night, one might die before the slightest help could come.

MARTHA. You might go and ask the neighbors.

NANETTE. Neighbors! They are all such a long way off.

MAREX. True. It *is* lonely.

MARTHA. It would not be so inconvenient if we could have afforded a horse and carriage of our own.

MAREX. And besides, it's too large; five or six servants are needed to keep all this up. There's that wood, seven acres —a small forest; what's the good of it? I don't shoot—no one walks in it.

NANETTE. No, thanks—full of horrid tramps. I met one the other day. Ugh!

MARTHA (*laughing*). You foolish old Nanette.

MAREX. Some beggar.

NANETTE. He had an ugly face, he'd only——

MAREX. An ugly face? Is that all? Well, next year we'll take our holiday somewhere else.

NANETTE. A good idea. I couldn't live here if I had to stay all alone, but fortunately there's the master and Blaise.

MAREX. By Jove, I was forgetting! (*He goes to the telephone and rings.*)

MARTHA. What are you doing?

MAREX. I am telephoning to Rivoire. (*He speaks into the telephone.*) Hullo! Give me Vitré, 27632—as quick as possible, please. Thanks. (*To* MARTHA.) I am going to tell them I arrive about eight this evening.

MARTHA. What train do you take back?

MAREX. The ten-forty express. I shall be in Paris at five-fifteen to-morrow morning. If you want to reach me before that, you can telephone me at Rivoire's this evening up till nine o'clock.

MARTHA. And in Paris?

MAREX. Hotel Terminus Room 16. (*Telephone rings. Speaking into telephone.*) Hullo! Is that you, old chap? Yes, yes, but I have had the telephone put in. Expensive, as there's no exchange at Servon. I am on the Luxeuil Exchange—most expensive of the lot; but it was a necessity for my business. Yes. I say I'm coming to take coffee with you this evening. I am going by the Paris Express. Ur-

gent business. No, only coffee, I shall have dined. I'll be with you about eight. Hope I shan't disturb you.

MARTHA (*who has crossed to* MAREX). Say something pretty from me, and give my love to Lucienne.

MAREX (*speaking again into telephone*). Yes—she is here. She sends all sorts of kind messages to you and Lucienne.

MARTHA (*to her husband*). What! Did he hear?

MAREX (*still at the telephone*). Thanks. See you this evening. (*Hangs up the receiver.*)

MARTHA. Did he hear my voice?

MAREX. You were close to me. Never trust a telephone, if you're talking secrets.

MARTHA. Isn't it wonderful?

NANETTE (*listening*). I hear wheels.

MARTHA. Yes, it's the fly this time. (*A noise of hail heard.*)

NANETTE. It's coming through the wood.

MAREX. Thank goodness. I shall just make it.

PIERRE (*rising and crossing to his father*). Papa!

MAREX. Yes, old boy.

PIERRE. Daddy! I want you to bring me back a present.

MAREX. All right, old man. (*To* MARTHA.) Give me my bag. Where's Blaise?

MARTHA. In the dining-room. I'll call him.—Blaise! Blaise!

NANETTE (*looking out of window*). Here's the fly at last. (*Enter* BLAISE.)

BLAISE. Yes, Madame?

MAREX. Oh! Blaise, here's my world, my dear little world; I leave it all in your care. I know I can trust you while I'm away.

BLAISE. Monsieur can rely on me.

MAREX. Put my bag in the fly. (BLAISE *executes the orders and goes out.*)

MAREX (*kisses his child*). Good-bye, old sportsman; be good, or I'll forget all about that present.

PIERRE. Yes, Daddy, I'll be a very good boy.

MAREX. What would you like me to bring you?

PIERRE. Oh, Papa! Bring me back a little sister.

MAREX. My goodness, that's too expensive.

PIERRE. But, Papa, I want one all the same.

MAREX. Well, we'll see.

PIERRE. If a new one is too expensive, buy a second-hand one.

MAREX (*laughs and kisses the child*). A second-hand one! Very well, dear. (*Kissing his wife.*) Good-bye, Nanette, don't think any more of those silly things—you needn't be frightened. (BLAISE *enters.*) Blaise is here. Ah, that reminds me. I say, Blaise— (*Points to table and pulls out drawer.*) One never knows—it's best to be prepared—to frighten the ugly faces, as Nanette calls them; there is—look—in this drawer, you'll see a loaded revolver. (*Tries to shut the drawer.*) Why, I can't. You must keep it shut and be very careful; don't let the child get at it. Good-bye. Good-bye, dear one. I shall just make it by the skin of my teeth. (MARTHA, NANETTE *and* PIERRE *go up with him.*)

MARTHA. Good-bye.

MAREX (*stopping* MARTHA). Don't come out, you'll catch cold. (*He goes out. Then is heard:*) Now then, coachman, fast as you can, or we'll miss the train. Mind, Blaise, remember what I told you—I leave everything in your charge. (*Door slams.*)

PIERRE (*running suddenly to door*). Good-bye, Daddy; don't forget my little sister. (*Then he comes down to* NANETTE.)

NANETTE. Yes, Papa won't forget. Come and look at the pictures. (*She takes the child on her knee; he gradually falls asleep.*)

MARTHA (*at window*). There he is at the end of the avenue. I hope he'll be in time. What weather—a fog—you can hardly see the lamps; the carriage is turning round by the little wood—it's out of sight now; the rain's worse than ever. How dark it is already. This part of the country is very dull. Nanette!

NANETTE. Hush! he's going to sleep.

MARTHA. Ah! put him gently on the sofa and go and fetch

the lamp, it's too dark to see now. (*Re-enter* BLAISE.) Hush! the child's asleep. (*She goes out.* NANETTE *puts the child on the sofa and goes to fetch the lamp.*)

BLAISE (*in a low voice*). Monsieur is well on his way now; he has a wonderful horse.

MARTHA. Blaise, you might shut the shutters in the dining-room. And lock the outer gate.

BLAISE. Very good, and I'd better let the dogs loose, too?

MARTHA. Yes; oh, Blaise!

BLAISE. Madame?

MARTHA. It seems very lonely now your master is gone. I wonder—I wonder whether you'd mind sleeping on this floor to-night? You could make up a bed here.

BLAISE. Certainly, Madame, if you'd feel easier.

MARTHA. Thank you, Blaise, I am sure——

(NANETTE *reënters with a lamp in her hand, brings on book.* BLAISE *goes out.* MARTHA *says to* NANETTE)

I am asking Blaise to make his bed here in this room; you'll feel more comfortable.

NANETTE (*in a low voice*). Much more. We shan't be so nervous. (*Puts lamp on table.*)

MARTHA. "We?" Why don't you say "I," my good Nanette?

NANETTE. Well, *I* shall be the more comfortable. I don't pretend to be brave.

MARTHA. I do pretend, but I'm not.

NANETTE. Ah, well, I am quite an old woman. Never mind, three days pass quickly; the master will be back Wednesday at the latest, won't he? He didn't care about going, I know.

MARTHA. When we go upstairs to put the child to bed, Blaise can make his bed.

NANETTE. Yes. Look at him. Doesn't he look pretty? He is sleeping like a [illegible]. Will you have time to look through my books, Madame, before we put Pierre to bed?

MARTHA. He's [illegible]. Yes, it won't take ten minutes, will it?

NANETTE. Oh, not five.

MARTHA (*sitting Left of table, takes up an account book; looking at book; to* NANETTE). I gave you twenty francs yesterday——

NANETTE. Yes, Madame.

MARTHA. Good (*makes a calculation*). You paid the baker?

NANETTE. Yes, Madame—six francs, ten sous.

MARTHA. Six francs, ten sous—and the butcher, too?

NANETTE. Yes, here's his book. (*The wind blows and the rain increases.*)

MARTHA. How the wind's howling. (*Rises.*) Fasten the shutters. The wind sounds so dreary at night. (*Comes Left.*)

NANETTE (*opens window to shut the shutters*). Yes. (*Draws back quickly.*) Ah!

MARTHA. What's the matter?

NANETTE. There's someone in front of the window.

MARTHA (*turning*). What! Oh, nonsense! It's the reflection of the lamp.

NANETTE (*frightened and terrified*). No!

MARTHA (*goes to her*). Nanette, your nerves——

NANETTE (*draws back*). Oh, Madame, my heart's beating! Blaise must shut them, I can't. I'm too frightened.

MARTHA. What a coward! This is really going a little too far. Who do you think can be there? Come now, let me look.

(*Crosses to door at back, opens it, then recoils suddenly, uttering a stifled cry. She sees a tramp with his cap in his hand.* TRAMP *enters, leaving the door half open.*)

TRAMP. Beg pardon, lady——

MARTHA. Who are you? What do you want?

TRAMP (*looks round quickly*). I've got a letter. (*Feels in his pocket.*)

MARTHA. A letter! Where do you come from?

TRAMP (*feels in another pocket*). I've come up from the village.

MARTHA (*excitedly*). How did you get in? Why didn't you ring at the front door?

TRAMP (*looks round*). Don't know where the front door is. I took a short cut, came through the wood. (*Takes out tattered letter from his pocket and hands it to her.*)

MARTHA. Who is the letter for? Who gave it to you?

TRAMP. It's for Blaise, your servant: his mother's dying.

MARTHA (*with great emotion*). His mother dying! Nanette, take it to Blaise at once.

NANETTE. Yes, Madame. (*She goes out.*) Poor fellow! Oh, poor fellow!

MARTHA. Make haste! Make haste! (*To* TRAMP.) Who gave you the letter?

TRAMP. Somebody I don't know—he told me where I was to take it—said I was to run, that's all.

MARTHA. Wait a moment, there may be an answer.

(*Little* PIERRE *in his sleep knocks over the picture-book lying near him on the arm-chair.* MARTHA *looks at him.*)

Are you asleep, dear? (*Goes towards the sofa where the child is lying, tries to make him more comfortable and says without turning round.*) Sit down. Blaise is coming and you can explain to him.

(*The* TRAMP *is seated at some distance from the table. His eyes fall on the open drawer. He sees the revolver, looks round to see if he is observed, gets close to the drawer, takes out the revolver, goes on tip-toe to the half-open door and quickly disappears.*)

PIERRE (*in his sleep*). Nanette!

MARTHA (*goes to the sofa and leans over the couch, her back to the table*). Nanette's coming soon. Never mind, dear, we're going to put you to bed—there, go to sleep, go to sleep. Mamma is with you. He's too far away from the fire. (*She jumps down near the fire.*) Besides, the door is open. Will you shut the door, if you— (*Turns round.*) Why, where is he? (*Draws herself up.*) Gone! I told him to stay, he couldn't have understood. Perhaps he is waiting outside. (*Crosses to French window and looks out.*)

No, there's no one there. (*Closes the window to the Right.*) He's gone, he couldn't have understood. (*Enter* NANETTE.) Well?

NANETTE. I gave Blaise the letter—he read it; the poor fellow cried. Why, where is that boy? (*Looks around.*)

MARTHA. He's gone. He didn't understand. Blaise! Well, Blaise, I'm so sorry. (BLAISE *enters, wiping his eyes.*)

BLAISE. Madame, my mother is ill—dying, they say; she wants to see me; she keeps asking for me.

MARTHA. Oh, my poor Blaise, did she write to you?

BLAISE. No, she couldn't write the letter. One of the neighbors has written for her. (*Weeps.*)

NANETTE. Poor Blaise! What are you going to do?

BLAISE (*undecided*). I don't know. What can I do?

MARTHA. Nanette, Blaise must go at once; his mother is dying—he must see her.

BLAISE. Can you spare me, Madame? I'll not be long.

MARTHA. Go at once. (BLAISE *starts for the door.*)

NANETTE. We'll be all alone.

BLAISE (*turns round and stops*). Madame, I can't leave you alone. Master left you in my care.

NANETTE. He'll be very angry.

BLAISE. I had better go to-morrow morning—at daybreak. You won't be afraid at daybreak, Madame?

MARTHA (*crosses to* BLAISE, *who withdraws a little*). I'm not frightened—what is there to be frightened of? We'll lock up carefully. Nanette's absurd. You go, Blaise, leave us. I'll explain to Monsieur; I'll tell him that I insisted. Go. You can be in Servon in half an hour.

BLAISE. Oh, in less than that.

MARTHA. You can get a cab to bring you back. You need not be very long.

BLAISE. You may take my word for it, I shall lose no time, Madame.

MARTHA. Close the shutters before you go. (*To* NANETTE.) We mustn't be selfish. We should never forgive ourselves

for not allowing him to see his mother for the last time. (*Aloud to* BLAISE.) That's all right. Now go.

BLAISE. You have a kind heart, Madame. The house is all shut up. I shall run all the way. I'll drive back. I should like to see her before— (*Breaks down.*) I shan't be more than two hours at the outside, I promise you, Madame. I'll be back before nine.

NANETTE (*nervously*). Oh, yes, before nine.

MARTHA. That'll be all right—wrap yourself up, it's raining. I'll lock the door behind you, Nanette hasn't the courage.

BLAISE. Thank you, Madame, thank you. (*He goes out, followed by* MARTHA.)

NANETTE. Oh, no, I haven't the courage! This great lonely house terrifies me; one might be strangled before help could come. I read in the paper only yesterday that——

(*Door slams off Right.* MARTHA *reënters.*)

MARTHA. I have shut the door after him. There, now we're all right. Quite safe we'll wait here till Blaise comes back; the child is still asleep.

NANETTE (*going to the sofa*). Yes, he's fast asleep, bless him. Shall we put him to bed?

MARTHA. No, let him be. We'll all go up to bed when Blaise comes back. (*Sits down at the table again.*) We'll go on with the accounts. Where was I? (*To* NANETTE.) You paid the butcher, you said?

NANETTE. Yes, Madame.

MARTHA. Have we the book?

NANETTE (*fumbling for it*). Here it is.

MARTHA. Good. You must order six bottles of Vichy tomorrow. Don't forget.

NANETTE. The usual kind?

MARTHA. Yes, of course—for Monsieur.

NANETTE (*laughing*). And Blaise.

MARTHA. How do you mean, Blaise?

NANETTE. Oh, he takes a glass from time to time.

MARTHA (*laughing*). Oh, very well.

NANETTE. But don't say I said so. (*Stops suddenly.*) Madame, what's that? Don't you hear——?

MARTHA. What? Again?

NANETTE. Someone whistling.

MARTHA (*dryly*). No, nothing; it's the wind howling.

(NANETTE *takes up her knitting.*)

Did you pay the laundress?

NANETTE (*rises, puts her knitting on the arm-chair, and crosses to the door*). There, again! That's not the wind. Don't you hear it?

MARTHA (*going to her—listening*). The dogs—they're growling. Well?

NANETTE (*to herself*). There's someone in the grounds.

MARTHA (*impatiently*). Perhaps Blaise has forgotten something and has come back.

NANETTE. The dogs know him—they're barking—they're far away, near the back door.

MARTHA (*impatiently*). There's someone passing——

NANETTE. Or a thief!

MARTHA. They often look like that. You are too absurd!

NANETTE. Not like that. They're rushing about.

MARTHA (*listens—beginning to get nervous*). Yes.

NANETTE. Ah, Madame, they're coming nearer—they are chasing someone—they are quite close; now they're further off. Ah, the footsteps are coming nearer! I hear them on the gravel.

MARTHA. Nanette! Nanette!

NANETTE. There, quite close—the other side of the door, maybe.

MARTHA. Nanette.

NANETTE (*to herself*). Yes, there, the other side; perhaps they're trying to get in—to force the shutters.

MARTHA (*frightened*). Be quiet, Nanette. (*Extends her hands to* NANETTE.)

NANETTE (*takes her hands*). Ah, Madame, you are frightened, too; your hand is trembling.

MARTHA. It's you. These fancies of yours are foolish. You'll end by making me frightened.

NANETTE. I'm terrified, Madame. (*Falls into a chair.*)

MARTHA (*nervously, in a weak voice*). Come now, you silly woman, if there were thieves there—at the door—the dogs would bark. We hear nothing.

NANETTE. That's true—unless—— (*They look at each other.*)

MARTHA. Unless——?

NANETTE. They *can't* bark now!

MARTHA. How foolish! (*A long pause.*) I hear nothing but the storm. You see——

NANETTE. Yes?

MARTHA (*quickly chaffing her*). You see, it was nothing.

NANETTE (*regaining her courage*). Let's hope so.

MARTHA. Come, pull yourself together, Nanette.

NANETTE. I'm trembling all over. You're pale, too, Madame.

MARTHA. Well, it's all over now. Really, you quite upset me for a moment. Make the fire up a little, it's going out. (*To herself, impatiently.*) It's only eight o'clock! (*Trying to think of something else.*) André must have reached M. Rivoire's house by now. They are nice people, the Rivoires. You remember them, Nanette?

NANETTE (*reassuring herself*). Oh, yes, master's there by now, quite comfortable.

MARTHA. I've a good mind to telephone him and tell him that Blaise's mother is so ill.

NANETTE (*delighted*). Yes, yes, do, Madame. It'll be a distraction for us,— (*pointing to telephone*) to hear his voice at the other end of that wire: it'll almost seem as if he were here with us. You'll let me listen, Madame?

MARTHA. Yes, yes. (*Takes off receiver and rings.*) Hullo! Hullo!

NANETTE. Oh, what a wonderful invention that is! There's the master miles away, and yet he can talk to us as if he were quite close to us in this room.

MARTHA (*at the telephone*). Hullo! Hullo!

NANETTE. I'm quite sure I'll feel better when I hear his voice. I shan't be frightened then. It'll be as if the master were here.

MARTHA (*at the telephone, as the curtain falls*). Ah! Will you give me Vitré 27632? Quick—quick—— Good! Thank you, I'll hold the wire.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE 2

A study. Chairs and arm chairs. Telephone on table Center. As the curtain rises, the telephone rings; at the same moment the door at back opens and a MANSERVANT *enters and goes to telephone.*

SERVANT (*speaks into telephone*). Hullo! Hullo! Madame —ah—Monsieur Marex—Who is it? Oh, very good, Madame—. Yes, he is here with Monsieur and Madame Rivoire in the dining-room—just arrived. I'll call him—. Yes, Madame—very good—if you'll hold the wire, Madame. (*He lays down the receiver and crosses to door at back. At this moment same door opens and* MONSIEUR *and* MADAME RIVOIRE *and* MAREX *enter.*)

MADAME RIVOIRE (*to* SERVANT). Justin, you can serve the coffee here.

SERVANT. Very good, Madame. (*To* MAREX.) Someone for you on the telephone, M. Marex.

MAREX. Ah! (*Looks round for telephone.*)

RIVOIRE (*pointing to telephone*). There it is on the table

(SERVANT *enters with tray.*)

RIVOIRE (*to* SERVANT). You may bring in the old brandy—you know, the one with the red seal.

SERVANT. Very good, Monsieur. (*He goes out.*)

MAREX (*at telephone*). Hullo! Hullo! Hullo! Hullo! (*A pause.*)

RIVOIRE. Can't you get an answer?

MAREX. No. (*At telephone again.*) Is that you? Hullo! Hullo!

MADAME RIVOIRE. They've cut you off already. They are always playing that trick!

RIVOIRE (*to* MAREX). Yes, always—if one's not there to answer immediately.

MAREX. It's the same thing everywhere. Well, my wife must ring me up again. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

MADAME RIVOIRE (*pouring out coffee for* MAREX). Sugar?

MAREX. Thanks, no.

RIVOIRE (*a cup in his hand*). My dear fellow, the telephone is a fine invention—very useful, but badly organized—at any rate in France.

MAREX. All the same, it's better than nothing. It may be my fault—it's a most astonishing thing, but if I were to telephone twenty times a day, I should never get the hang of the blessed thing; it beats me—it seems weird and uncanny. (*Reënter* SERVANT *with a bottle*).

SERVANT. The brandy, Monsieur. (*Puts it on table and goes out.*)

RIVOIRE (*to* MAREX). Now, look here, I'm going to let you taste my finest and oldest—1857.

MAREX. 1857?

RIVOIRE. A marvel.

MADAME RIVOIRE. The Curé at Vitré offered us fifty francs a bottle for it.

RIVOIRE. Don't let's talk of him.

MAREX (*sipping slowly*). Oh, exquisite. You were right, it's marvelous.

RIVOIRE (*offering cigarettes*). Well, are you comfortable there in that castle of yours, a hundred miles from anywhere?

MAREX. Comfortable! Very uncomfortable, old man. You don't catch us there next summer.

MADAME RIVOIRE. Where do you think of going?

MAREX. To Touraine—it's not so far from Paris and it's more cheerful.

RIVOIRE. You pay very high rent at La Chesnaye?

MAREX. Very. It's not only that, it's the situation. We're away from everything: it's so inconvenient—we have to change trains three times to get to Paris. It's almost impossible for me with my business to see to. I've had to go to the expense of a telephone, and a nice penny it's cost me!

MADAME RIVOIRE. I am not surprised. Between Luxeuil and Servon there is a stretch of road —— (*At this moment the telephone bell begins to ring.*)

MAREX. Yes— (*Goes to telephone.*) Hullo! hullo! Ah! is that you, darling? Yes, very pleasant journey. Your friends are quite well. How are you? Not in bed yet? Blaise not there!—His mother? -oh, poor boy! You were quite right, certainly. Nanette was wrong. Poor fellow. Did you tell him to hurry back—to take a carriage?—That's right—. I don't think you're frightened. Are you? What a good thing! A noise just now? The dogs! That happens every evening. Do you remember that row last Monday?- Nanette is a silly old coward worse than a baby. Has he gone to bed? No? You're waiting for Blaise?—That will be better- Ah! he's asleep—the bell woke him up. Bring him and let him say good-night to me. —Good-night, my pet, were you asleep? If you have been very good when I go back— (*Turns to the* RIVOIRES, *laughing.*) He doesn't know how to hold the receiver. (*Into the telephone.*) Tell him he shall perhaps have his little sister. I have been thinking it over, I think I can promise him one— (*Laughs.*) Shall we buy one between us? Yes—quite new—eh? (*Pause.*) What's the matter? Nanette hears something else? Tell her to come and let me scold her. Is that you, Nanette? Are you never going to change? Noises, eh? What sort of noises? What are you afraid of? You're well locked in—well bolted it's folly. Come, go to sleep. Blaise will be back in an hour at the out-

side. I forbid you ever to read the stories in the *Petit Journal* again—they go to your head. All right. Good-night.—Pleasant dreams.—Good-night, dear little wife—till to-morrow. Don't you think it's wonderful? You are close to me—I hear the slightest inflection in your voice—almost every movement—can very nearly see you—yes, I see you, little wife. You know what that is. (*Kisses her through telephone.*)

MADAME RIVOIRE. One would think you were turtle doves.

RIVOIRE. Don't mind us.

MAREX (*into the telephone*). Our friends are chaffing me—but I don't mind. Good-bye till to-morrow. Yes, my darling. To-morrow. (*Leaves off speaking and hangs up the receiver.*)

RIVOIRE. If we had not been here——

MADAME RIVOIRE. To what lengths might they not have gone!

RIVOIRE. Fortunately the two phones are rather far apart.

MAREX (*gaily*). Seventy kilometers from one mouth to the other.

RIVOIRE. Your coffee is cold.

MAREX. Oh, that doesn't matter. (*Drinks.*) Just fancy, we have an old servant who is very devoted, but most incredibly nervous—the least noise upsets her. She always thinks there are thieves—murderers——

(RIVOIRE *lights a cigarette.*)

RIVOIRE. I suppose the place is quite safe?

MAREX. Oh, Lord, yes, quite safe, I think—the same as anywhere else. We're rather lonely, it's true, but Mad——

MADAME RIVOIRE. Haven't you a manservant who sleeps in the house when you're not there?

MAREX. Yes, Blaise, a good fellow, but it happens he has been called away to his mother, who is very ill.

RIVOIRE. Oh, then they're alone?

MAREX. Oh, only for an hour or two. I must confess I am a little scared, but I wouldn't say so to Martha. Besides, she couldn't do anything else under the circumstances.

There's no danger—it's quite ridiculous to worry one's self over such things as that.

MADAME RIVOIRE. My goodness! one can never take too many precautions; one reads such frightful things in the papers.

MAREX. Why, you're as bad as Nanette. (*Telephone bell rings again.*)

RIVOIRE (*going to telephone*). Well, what's the matter now? What—Ah! (*going to* MAREX.) It's your wife, old man. (*Hands him the receiver.*)

MAREX (*rather anxiously rises and crosses to telephone*). Is that you? How differently your voice sounds! What's the matter? You hear footsteps—in the garden? Perhaps it's Blaise. Then you'll be well protected. Perhaps it's the dogs on the gravel walk? A kind of muffled noise—near the door? Come now, I beg you, I entreat you not to lose your head. Are you listening to me? Yes, I entreat you. Baby is crying—I hear him. You are frightening him. Please calm yourselves. Nanette is very much to blame—it's she who has frightened you—yes, you *are* frightened. Behind the door? Still? Come, come, it's impossible. Listen, it's quite easy to make sure. You know there's the revolver in the table drawer; I left it there—loaded. Listen! Open one of the windows very quietly. You don't dare? Why, I hardly know you you who are so brave! Open the window, not the shutters, just the window, and fire the revolver once. Never mind if it does spoil them—that'll frighten them—if there's anyone there; but I don't think there is—it's impossible.—It *is*? Ah! perhaps it's some animal—a fox.—I entreat you not to tremble like that. Do what I tell you—fire; take care not to hurt yourself. Warn baby so that he is not frightened. Do what I tell you. I am listening.—You can tell me——

RIVOIRE (*rather puzzled, turns to* MAREX). Why, what's the matter?

MAREX (*to* RIVOIRE). My dear fellow, they are frightened to death—that's all. They say they hear noises—steps—creakings—all sorts of things on the other side of the door

opening onto the park. It's all imagination. Nevertheless, if there were a train that could take me back, I'd go——

RIVOIRE. Why don't you telephone to the village?

MAREX. There is no central station there. We are on the Luxeuil central.

RIVOIRE. Telephone to Luxeuil then—tell them to send someone.

MAREX. That's much too far. Oh, I am beginning to be frightened, too—I am—I don't know what's the matter with me.

RIVOIRE. It's all right.

MAREX. Yes; see here, I am thinking—Blaise leaving so soon after me—this coincidence——

RIVOIRE. That's foolish. Come, come.

MAREX. Yes, it is foolish. (*At telephone.*) What do you mean? The revolver's not there? That's impossible. Come along—look for it quick. Everywhere? In the drawer? At the back? Nothing? Where do you think it can be? I left it there. (*To the* RIVOIRES.) Ah, my friends!

RIVOIRE. Yes? (*He and his wife get up, their emotion increasing until the end of the scene; they are standing, following every word and movement of* MAREX.)

MAREX. What? Nothing? Then it has been taken?—Who?—Not Blaise? Then whom?—A Tramp! Ah, speak more clearly—I can't hear you—there's a buzzing in my ears.—What do you say? Oh, Martha, don't be afraid, I entreat you, I implore you—I am here—I am here. It's cracking! Being forced! Impossible! The shutters are solid. Ah, I hear you trembling! The baby is crying. Don't make a noise. Make him be quiet.—Be quiet, my pet, I beg you, dear little Pierre. Yes, put out the lamp. Tell Nanette—directly—that will drive them away, perhaps—I don't know—I—I—Ah, my God! Now under the window shutters—you think—several people—and also behind the door! They're slipping something under—Ah!—call! shout!—frighten them!—scream—call!—cry 'Help'!—It's ghastly! Yes,

you're right. Don't scream. Run away and take the child. Yes, run away—run through the kitchen. Run! Ah! (*Utters a piercing cry.*) Oh! who was that who screamed! Martha! Martha! Was that you? Answer! Answer! I say! What are they doing? What are they doing to you? Ah!—they're being killed! They're being strangled—ah!—Help!—Murder! Help!

(*Leaving the telephone and rushing out like a madman, while* MONSIEUR *and* MADAME RIVOIRE *try to restrain him.*) Help!—Murder!—Murder!—Help! (*Continues to scream as the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

THE HOST

BY

FERENC MOLNAR

Translated from the Hungarian by Joseph Szebenyei

FERENC MOLNAR

Ferenc Molnar was born at Budapest in 1878. He studied at the Universities of Geneva and Budapest. Beginning his literary career in the newspaper world, he soon made a place for himself as a writer of novels and short stories. He is now known, however, as the outstanding figure in the contemporary Hungarian theatrical world.

His best-known plays have been produced in America during the last decade; *Liliom, The Devil, The Swan,* and *The Guardsman.*

The Host is the first of his one-act plays to appear in book form in the English language.

Published plays (only English translations noted): *The Devil: The Swan; Fashions for Men, The Guardsman; Liliom; Husbands and Lovers* (dialogues); *The Host.*

CHARACTERS

DAVID ANGELL, *financier*
MRS. ANGELL, *his wife*
WOLFF, *Angell's associate in business*
MRS. WOLFF
FRIEDRICH
MRS. FRIEDRICH
COLMARK
MRS. COLMARK
FIRST DETECTIVE
SECOND DETECTIVE
GUESTS
SERVANTS

SCENE: *The Angell residence, Budapest.*

TIME: *The present.*

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THE HOST

The dining-room of the ANGELL *home. The guests are sitting round a large table. At the head of the table,* MRS. ANGELL *presiding. At the lower end,* MR. ANGELL. *There are fourteen guests in all. The table is well burdened with flasks and dishes. The dinner appears to be nearly at an end, and the time is ripe for the speeches. The company gives the impression of a well-to-do gathering, the women are bediamonded and the men look prosperous. The atmosphere is that of a newly-rich parvenu crowd, somewhat exhilarated by the richness of the supper and the champagne. The dining-room itself presents a picture of abundant wealth and bad taste in rich furnishing. The characters are of a similar hue.*

When the curtain rises a general conversation is in progress, everybody speaking to everybody else. Loud, boisterous laughter dominates the chaotic scene.

MRS. FRIEDRICH. Isn't he charming?

MR. WOLFF. The loveliest man alive.

MRS. WOLFF (*to her neighbor*). You can tell it to me above the table. Why telegraph with your feet?

COLMARK (*raising his glass*). To the Host. Long live the host.

ALL (*raising glasses*). Long live the host. (*They drink.*)

COLMARK (*rises*). Ladies and gentlemen.

(*The noise subsides, and after* WOLFF *taps on a glass silence prevails.*)

WOLFF. Let's hear what our friend Colmark has to say.

(*The* HOST *and* HOSTESS *assume positions of dignity and seriousness in expectation of something important to come.*)

As you know perhaps, I am not an orator and am not addicted to speech-making. Still, I cannot allow this glorious moment to pass without making a few remarks, such as I am sure will reëcho in the heart of everyone here present.

THE GUESTS. Hear, hear!

WOLFF. I have been associated in business with our beloved host, Mr. Angell, for many years past, and you all know that there never was a partnership founded on such close friendship and absolute harmony and trust as our partnership.

(MRS. ANGELL *wipes her eyes.*)

There are moments in one's life when the acknowledgment of all those noble and unselfish deeds bestowed upon one by another come, as it were, to the surface. That moment has arrived, so far as I am concerned.

(MR. ANGELL *rises in his chair and listens even more eagerly.* MRS. ANGELL *continues wiping her eyes.*)

In business one is not sentimental, and I have never as much as said in all these years of our close association: "David Angell, you are a fine and honest fellow. David Angell, I can only shake your hand in thanks and appreciation for what you have done for me and for all of us." That is about all I could tell him face to face, and even now I am not sure whether he would like me to say what I should like to tell you about him.

COLMARK (*who is the humorist of the party, interrupting*). Only his wings are missing! (*General laughter.*)

WOLFF. A partnership is a partnership. It means . . . it means. . . .

COLMARK. Quarreling. . . . (*General laughter.*)

WOLFF. Yes, that's just what it means in almost every firm where there are partners. But in David Angell, Incorporated, it means something else. It means trust and understanding. It means everything in the world *but* quarreling. If you know anything about David Angell, you must know that he is not a man to quarrel with. He is good at heart, clean in mind and body, the personification of graciousness

and helpfulness. I know that if I were to find myself in trouble and David Angell were called upon to lay down his life for me, he would unhesitatingly do so. Or if he should be called upon to sacrifice his last sou to save me from disgrace or bankruptcy, he would sacrifice it as willingly as he would for himself.

(*They all rise and clink glasses.*)

To the health of the finest man alive!

ANGELL (*bowing to the guests, deeply affected*). Thank you, my friends, thank you. (*He goes over to* WOLFF *and kisses him on the cheek.*)

MRS. ANGELL (*now crying profusely*). Ignace Wolff is a fine fellow. The dearest friend we ever had.

COLMARK. Such partners ought to be exhibited in the dime museum. (*Nobody laughs, they are too deeply impressed.*) I'd think twice before I'd kiss my partner. (*This time he gets a smile from various guests.*)

ANGELL (*returns to his seat*). Ignace is a great speaker. He almost made me cry.

(FRIEDRICH *rises, glass in hand.*)

ALL. Hear, hear!

(*Silence.*)

FRIEDRICH. Mrs. Angell, Ladies and Gentlemen. May I take this opportunity to unburden my heart of certain sentiments that have accumulated in it these last few years since I have had the pleasure and great honor to meet our friend and host, Mr. David Angell, in a business way, and occasionally in society. To praise his good heart, his unquestionable virtue, his honesty and unselfishness would be simply to repeat what everybody proclaims. I can tell you more than that, I can point to even greater achievements on his part than mere human generosity. As President of the Bank where he keeps his deposits I can tell you that many thousands are devoted to charitable causes. This money is credited to accounts about which there is no newspaper publicity. Often other, less generous donors, insist on having their names printed. He is the man who is called "Anony-

mous," who gives not for the sake of the publicity it brings, but for the good it does.

(*General applause.*)

He never sought thanks for what he has done and for what he is constantly doing. I could also tell you that David Angell, the genius of money-making, never forgets to give the other fellow a chance. In my profession we know what it is to have a tip and to keep it. It means money to us. David Angell never fails to share his tips with others. I know one case where a good man lost out in a deal. No, not through David Angell. He was not the one who won. Still, he gave the man a lift. As unselfishly and as humanly as any man could wish for. He took that ruined man into his confidence and gave him the money to play the tip. How many people would do that?

COLMARK (*interrupting*). Not many angels on this earth!

FRIEDRICH. A man who has such capacity for making friends will become a living example to the younger generation. We can always point to him with pride, remind our children of his recorded deeds, and always be proud of having shaken his hand.

(MRS. ANGELL *sobs silently, wiping her eyes.*)

MRS. FRIEDRICH (*rises and goes to* FRIEDRICH, *smiling with pleasure*). You are a great speaker, Daniel; I am proud of you.

FRIEDRICH (*beaming with pleasure*). Thank you, my darling. It's good to know you appreciate me. You do it so very rarely.

ANGELL (*goes over to* FRIEDRICH, *who rises*). Thank you, my friend. (*He retires to his place.*)

(*The servants fill the glasses anew and the hum of conversation is again heard. One can make out only praise for* ANGELL *and his wife. The women rise and go over to* MRS. ANGELL *one by one, and kiss her.*)

(*They drink. A spirit of happy abandon prevails.*)

MRS. WORTH (*shouting*). Let's hear the host. Let's hear David Angell!

ALL. Let's hear David Angell.

ANGELL (*rises, clears his throat and raises his glass, as the servants retire.*) My dear friends, my dear brothers and sisters. Your kindness and the undeserved praise of my friends have touched me to the heart. I can scarcely find words to thank you for all the wonderful things you have said about me. I do not wish to play the rôle of modest benefactor, for I really cannot play any other rôle than that which is part of my nature. I admit I am trying to make this life more worth while. I am doing my best to make the people about me happy and contented. There is nothing unusual or deserving of special praise in that, for I am simply striving to follow the example of the greatest benefactor of all, who shared His mite with all comers and taught us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

ALL. Hear, hear!

ANGELL. It's not a matter of goodness or badness, but it is a matter of selfishness, you see, for I know I could not be happy or relish a bite of food if I knew that the fellow next door has nothing to eat while I am enjoying the best cuts. It's purely a matter of selfishness on my part. The same principle applies to my business ventures. I like to see my associates and friends reap where I reap, and it would make me miserable to do all the harvesting myself. I happen to be in the fortunate position of the man who hands out the prizes and I love to do it. Now as long as I derive pleasure out of it, why should that be credited to me as an unselfish deed, when it is, as a matter of fact, the height of selfishness?

COLMARK (*interrupting*). He wants us to believe that he is a wicked man. (*General laughter.*)

ANGELL. No, nothing of the sort, but I should like to make it clear to you that I am neither better nor worse than my fellows, and that while some people enjoy hoarding their money, I enjoy handing it out to others. The reaction is the same and the aim is the same: To gain enjoyment and satisfaction by it.

COLMARK. You are a great twister, Mr. Angell. (*They all laugh.*)

ANGELL. It gives me great joy and satisfaction to know that my friends who enjoy my selfishness, as I call it, would be just as unselfish—as they call it—towards me as I am towards them. I am sure—though I have never had the occasion and I hope it will never arise—that should they be called upon to stand by me in an emergency, they would all rise to the occasion as one man. That knowledge gives me a sense of security and peace of mind. It is the greatest gift of God: to have friends. He gave us love to fertilize our souls and I know that I have the love and affection of my friends, who of course have my love and affection. I raise my glass to the everlasting fidelity and loyalty of the friends I am so fortunate as to possess.

(*General applause, clinking of glasses. They all rise and drink to his health.*)

(COLMARK *rises.*)

ALL. Hear, hear!

COLMARK. I suppose it is not customary to rise and speak after the host has spoken, but I shall have to ask your kind indulgence. There are a number of things I should like to correct regarding certain misstatements of our beloved host and others that he has forgotten to state at all.

ANGELL (*smiling happily*). Well, well, what next?

COLMARK. We who are gathered here to-night are more or less interested in our host not only because of his personality and charming and unselfish mode of life, but also because he is, so to say, the mainstay of our business enterprises. We all know that many of us here would have spent most of our time in the bankruptcy courts if it had not been for him, and we all know that he never made anything big in the stock market without letting us in on it. If we are to honor the man let us give him his dues.

ANGELL (*shaking his head*). You are a fine humorist, Mr. Colmark, but please don't let us talk about that any more.

COLMARK. There is nothing to hide, Mr. Angell. I have had a few glasses and whenever I look deep into a glass I feel like telling the truth. I am speaking primarily for myself, but at the same time I am speaking for every man present here to-night. You have saved me from bankruptcy, and who knows from what else? You have saved Wolff there on several occasions, if I am not mistaken.

WOLFF. Let's drop these personalities. . . . After all that's a private matter!

FRIEDRICH. Let him finish. He'll have to tell all about me too.

COLMARK. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

FRIEDRICH. I agree with you there. Let's hear.

(*The women whisper together.*)

MRS. ANGELL. He is such a darling.

COLMARK. I thank you, Mrs. Angell. And because you were so generous I shall conclude my speech by saying: Long live our host and our hostess. (*He raises his glass. They all rise and clink glasses.*)

MR. ANGELL. And now let us all be happy and stop praising each other.

MRS. ANGELL (*to* MRS. WOLFF). Dorothy, darling, wouldn't you sing for us?

MRS. WOLFF (*coyly*). Who will accompany me?

COLMARK. May I have the pleasure? Anything within reason.

MRS. WOLFF (*affected*). Oh, you are always so funny.

(MRS. WOLFF *and* COLMARK *rise and start toward the piano.*)

MRS. ANGELL. Now we are going to hear something beautiful.

(*The two go to the piano.* COLMARK *begins to play the introductory notes when suddenly there is a commotion at the door. Loud and gruff voices are heard saying: "We must see him." "We can't wait."*

They all look in the direction of the commotion. There are two policemen at the entrance to the hall, but one

can look through the open folding doors of the dining-room at a considerable distance from the center of the stage proper.)

ANGELL (*rises and goes toward the hall*). What is it, John? What do the men want?

SERVANT (*outside*). They want to see you, sir.

(*There is a deep silence for a moment. The intruders appear to cause a general depression in the crowd, who all stare in their direction. A heavy air of foreboding fills the room. The attitude and expression on the faces of the characters should indicate that something unusual and distressing is about to happen.*)

ANGELL. Why not let them wait outside? I shall be with them immediately.

SERVANT. They don't want to wait, sir.

COLMARK. They seem awfully anxious to see you!

(*Outside one of the newcomers pushes the* SERVANT *aside and beckons to his companion to follow him. They come forward in a brusque manner. They wear heavy mustaches and look rough and unsuited to the splendor of the place.*)

ANGELL (*pale and nervous*). What is the meaning of this intrusion, gentlemen?

FIRST DETECTIVE (*talks with a heavy brogue, harsh and impassive*). Are you Mr. David Angell?

ANGELL. Yes.

FIRST DETECTIVE. We've got a warrant for your arrest.

(MRS. ANGELL *screams and sinks into her chair. The guests look at each other horrified. There is a moment's utter silence.*)

ANGELL (*turns pale and staggers back a few steps*). What—do—you—mean?

SECOND DETECTIVE. That's all we mean.

FIRST DETECTIVE (*coming nearer*). That's it. Warrant for your arrest.

MRS. WOLFF (*faceting*). Good Lord, good gracious me! (*She sinks into the chair next to the piano, where* COLMARK *tries his best to comfort her.*)

ANGELL. I don't understand.

FIRST DETECTIVE. We are city detectives. (*He opens his coat lapel and shows a badge.*) We have an order to arrest David Angell, banker and broker. Are you the man?

ANGELL. I am, of course, but——

SECOND DETECTIVE. There is no but about it. That's all there's to it. Come along.

MRS. ANGELL. But why, but why? He didn't steal anything.

FIRST DETECTIVE. We don't know what he stole or not. We got the order and we have to carry it out. We don't go askin' what it's for. That's not our business.

SECOND DETECTIVE. What we are here for is to carry out the order and get the prisoner to the station. And we can't stand here arguing about it either.

MRS. ANGELL. But what for? He didn't commit any crime.

FIRST DETECTIVE. How do you know that, ma'am?

MRS. ANGELL. He is my husband. Why shouldn't I know? Who should know if I don't?

ANGELL (*to* MRS. ANGELL). Don't upset yourself, darling. Better telephone to my lawyer, Schwartz.

SECOND DETECTIVE. That's a good idea.

(*During this scene the rest of the company stand by listening intently. At this juncture they begin to recover their senses and look at each other furtively and suspiciously. They begin to move about the room in utter discomfort and embarrassment.*)

MRS. ANGELL. But why should they arrest my husband, who never harmed anyone? Why should the best and noblest man in the world be arrested when all the crooks are running about unmolested? (*To* ANGELL.) Is there anything behind this, dear? What does it all mean?

MRS. WOLFF (*to* WOLFF). Are we going, Oscar? I think we ought to be going.

WOLFF. Wait a minute.

MRS. FRIEDRICH. It's getting rather late.

MRS. ANGELL (*to* ANGELL). Are you sure there is no reason for this? No grounds for——?

ANGELL (*pale and agitated, he sinks into a chair. To the* DETECTIVES). Just a moment, please. I feel rather weak. Just a minute.

FIRST DETECTIVE. All right, take your time.

SECOND DETECTIVE. We've got a taxi outside.

ANGELL (*taking no notice*). I really don't know. (*To* MRS. ANGELL.) It can't be on account of those Transylvanian shares. No, I don't imagine——?

MRS. ANGELL. The Transylvanian shares? Why, it was the cleanest deal you ever made.

ANGELL (*wiping his forehead*). Then of course it might be that Weffle made a complaint and—he might have brought a charge—er—oh, nonsense!

MRS. ANGELL. You are raving! Why, he cheated you in that deal; *you* wouldn't have cheated him! It's preposterous! The idea!

(*She has held herself bravely up to now, but by this time she is sobbing fast and can hardly restrain her tears.*)

MRS. COLMARK (*to* MRS. WOLFF). I am afraid we shall have to go home. The children are expecting us back before midnight.

MRS. WOLFF. So are mine.

MRS. ANGELL (*nervously*). Do you think that deal in Consolidated——?

ANGELL (*looking around until he finds* WOLFF, *his eyes resting upon his figure. Pause.*)

MRS. ANGELL (*impatiently*). Anything wrong with Consolidated? Why don't you speak?

ANGELL. How can I tell? I bought the shares cheap, it's true, but how could I know where they came from? I was quite certain the brokers who sold them to me were all right!

MRS. FRIEDRICH (*fidgeting nervously*). I am so sorry, but really it is getting late——

MRS. ANGELL (*taking no notice of her*). You think they might have come into their possession illegally?

ANGELL. How could I tell? And if they did, what of it? Why should I be held responsible?

MRS. WOLFF (*to* WOLFF, *in a whisper*). I want to go. Let's get out of this. It's terrible.

WOLFF (*aloud*). Yes, darling. We shall have to be going.

ANGELL (*reproachfully*). Besides, my friends, most of those present have profited by the deal. Wolff, didn't you get a block of that stock, too?

WOLFF (*flushing with anger*). I wish you'd not implicate other people in your affairs!

MRS. WOLFF. It's preposterous to mention my husband's name in connection with such deals. Come, let us go.

ANGELL (*confused, in a surprised tone*). Why, Wolff, wasn't it you who assured me that the sellers were reliable? Didn't I ask you whether they were honest? Didn't I suggest that the stocks might have been stolen? And you said, "Nonsense!"

WOLFF. I wish you wouldn't drag my name into your crooked dealings. I followed your advice; you didn't follow mine. Besides, I had nothing to do with the whole thing. Everything was carried out in your name and the rest is not my business.

ANGELL (*snarling*) (FRIEDRICH). I say, Friedrich, you had a small lot of it? Are you going to drop out now, too?

MRS. FRIEDRICH (*to* ANGELL, *in an offended tone*). I don't see why you should have to drag in everybody? If you are such an unselfish creature as you claim to be, why drag in my husband? You should take the responsibility for your deals if you are a man.

ANGELL. What do you say, Friedrich?

FRIEDRICH (*gasping*). Well, you know, David, I stand by you, but after all you can't expect me to drag my name through the mud. I've got a large family to take care of and you can't expect me to. . . . Why, whatever I can do, of course- —

MRS. FRIEDRICH (*to* FRIEDRICH). We can go now. That was quite enough. (*To* MRS. WOLFF.) I never saw such a selfish and cowardly man in all my life.

ANGELL. Well, I suppose I shall have to go, now. You tele-

phone to Schwartz, Alice. (*To* COLMARK.) I suppose I can count on you, Colmark? Perhaps there'll be bail to arrange for——

COLMARK (*annoyed*). You know I leave for Paris in the morning. You have friends enough to help you. I'd like to stay, but you see, it's very important that I——

MRS. COLMARK (*with her hat on and her cloak on her arm*). You will have to get up early in the morning, dear. We must be off.

FIRST DETECTIVE. Now, let's get on, Mr. Angell. We can't waste any more time.

MRS. ANGELL (*weeping bitterly*). No, no, I can't let you go, I can't. He is innocent. He didn't do anything. . . .

ANGELL (*soothingly*). Don't cry, darling. It will be all right. I shall be back in an hour. Just you ring up the lawyer. (*To* DETECTIVE.) Where are you going to take me? To Headquarters?

FIRST DETECTIVE. Yes.

(*While this scene is being played the guests are all backing out through the hall. They put on their hats and coats and file back in couples, then out again. There must be the impression that they are trying to get away unnoticed.*)

ANGELL (*to* SERVANT). Get me my hat and coat.

(SERVANT *goes out.*)

MRS. ANGELL (*crying bitterly*). No, no, don't take him away. He will die. His heart is weak and his liver is bothering him.

ANGELL (*consoling her*). Don't worry, dear, I shall be back soon. They wouldn't keep me there.

SECOND DETECTIVE. Let's get on. We are wasting time.

MRS. COLMARK (*to* MRS. FRIEDRICH). What do you say to that? I never thought he was a receiver of stolen goods.

MRS. FRIEDRICH. One ought to be more careful about accepting invitations.

(THE SERVANT *returns and helps* ANGELL *with his coat.*)

ANGELL (*kisses* MRS. ANGELL). Don't cry, dear.

WOLFF. Well, I suppose we must be off. (*To* MRS. ANGELL.) Give me a ring, Mrs. Angell, if you should want anything.

FIRST DETECTIVE. Well, ready?

ANGELL (*to the guests*). I am sorry our little party was interrupted so unpleasantly. Please excuse me. (*Deep silence. Pause.*) It is most gratifying to know that I can count upon my friends in any emergency.

FRIEDRICH. You can always count on me, Angell.

ANGELL. Thank you, my friend.

SECOND DETECTIVE. Let's go. (*They start toward the door,* ANGELL *walking between the two* DETECTIVES. *When they reach the door the two men suddenly turn and tear off their false moustaches and wigs and begin to laugh boisterously.*)

MRS. ANGELL (*looks up in surprise*). Why, that's Louis and Peter.

DETECTIVES (*laughing*). Sure, Louis and Peter.

(ANGELL *looks at them, surprised and shocked.*)

MRS. WOLFF. What does this mean?

FIRST DETECTIVE (*to* MRS. ANGELL). You can't say, Auntie, it wasn't a good joke?

SECOND DETECTIVE (*still laughing*). None of them recognized us.

MRS. ANGELL (*sourly*). A good joke it was!

ANGELL. You scoundrels!

SECOND DETECTIVE. Now, Uncle Dave, you can't say it wasn't done fine. (*He laughs.*)

COLMARK. It wasn't badly done.

(*They all begin to assume a more cheerful aspect, and try their best to shake off the effects of the practical joke. They do not, however, succeed.*)

MRS. FRIEDRICH. Now that the joke is over, we had better start homeward.

ANGELL (*takes his coat off and handing it to the* SERVANT). There are good jokes and bad jokes, but this one was certainly a liberal education.

WOLFF (*to* ANGELL). You have learnt at least that we stand behind you in every emergency.

ANGELL. Yes!

WOLFF. Friends ought never to evade responsibility. I am with you, David, through thick and thin.

FRIEDRICH. So am I.

MRS. WOLFF (*to* MRS. ANGELL). I am sorry, dear, these bad boys upset you so much. You know we are always at your service. Please forget all about it.

MRS. ANGELL. I know, dear, you are all darlings. I am so glad it was just a joke.

(*Slowly, one by one, the guests leave.*)

ANGELL (*to* FRIEDRICH). I'll see you at the office in the morning.

FRIEDRICH. I shan't be in to-morrow. I have to go out of town.

(*General leave-taking, all sour and subdued. Only the two* DETECTIVES *are happy and smiling.*)

MRS. ANGELL. Good-bye, come again soon.

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